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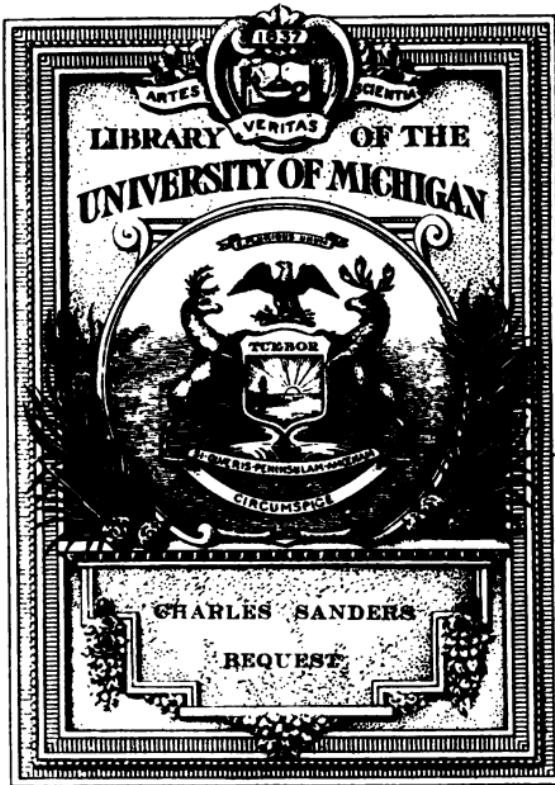
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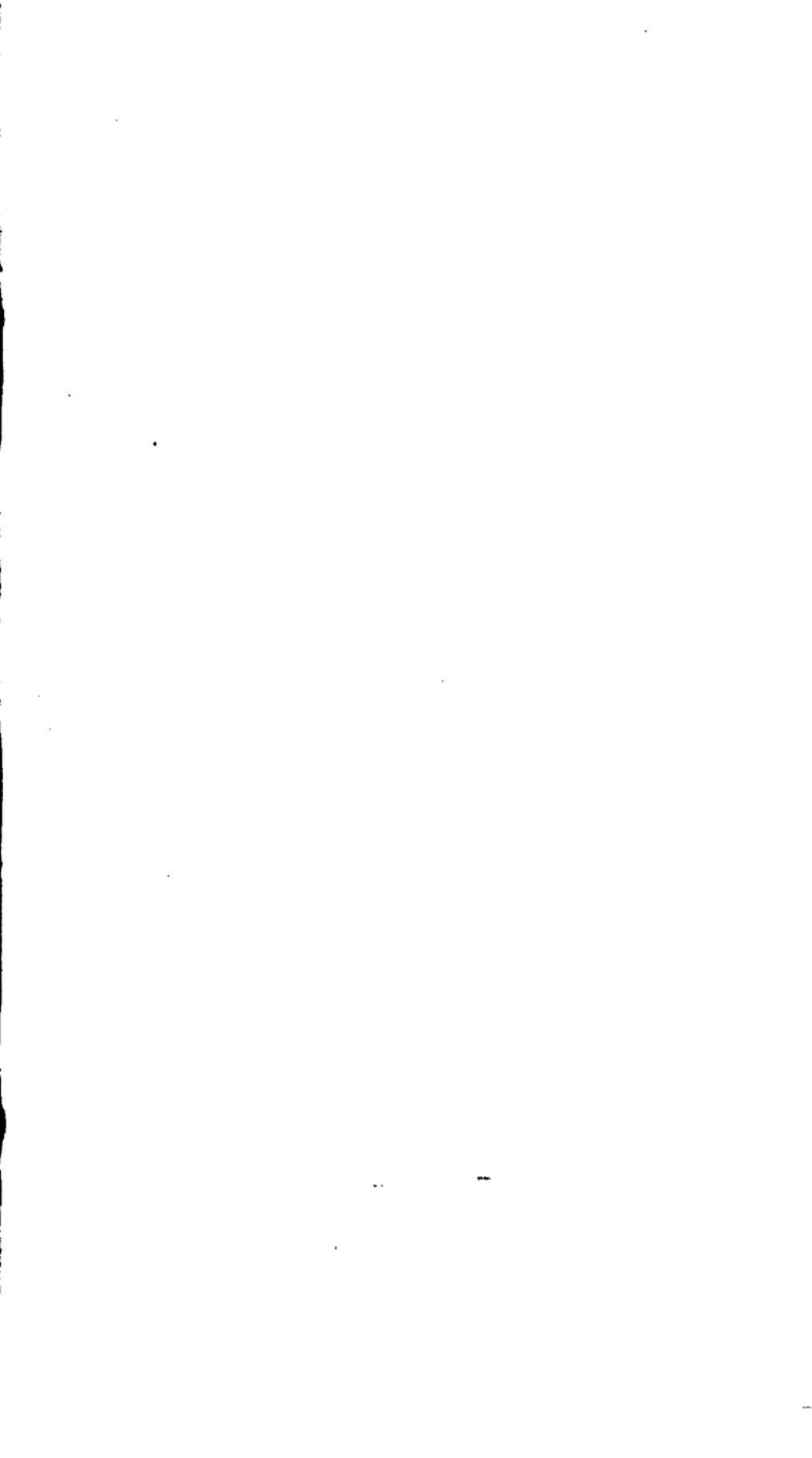
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MRS. SIDDONS.

*From a Picture in the possession of William Pittsburg Esq.*

HARPER & BROTHERS, 1834.

# L I F E

MRS. SIDDELL,

BY THOMAS CLAMPTON.

THIS is now the second volume brought to a completion, and it will be the second, and the last, of the series of "Papers on the History of the English Stage," and will be published at a periodical price of one shilling and sixpence, or two shillings and sixpence, according to the time of publication.

NEW-YORK:

CARLIER & BROTHERS, CLIFF-STREET.

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1834



1834. — A. & C. H. HARPER, PUBLISHERS.

**HARPER & BROTHERS, 1834.**

L I F E  
OF  
M R S. S I D D O N S.

BY THOMAS CAMPBELL.

"Pity it is that the momentary beauties flowing from a harmonious elocution cannot, like those of poetry, be their own record;—that the animated graces of the Player can live no longer than the instant breath and motion that represent them; or at least can but faintly glimmer through the memory and imperfect attestation of a few surviving spectators."—CIBBER.

NEW-YORK:  
HARPER & BROTHERS—82 CLIFF-STREET.

1834.



**TO SAMUEL ROGERS, Esq.**

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**MY DEAR FRIEND,**

I HAVE heard you say, that, rare as it was to meet with so gifted a genius as that of Mrs. Siddons, it was almost equally so to meet in human nature with so much candid and benignant singleness of mind as belonged to her personal character. Though this was always my own conviction, yet I was gratified to hear it strongly expressed by one so well acquainted with her, and possessing so much perspicacity. From the happiness which I have felt in the congeniality of our sentiments respecting the illustrious subject of this Volume, I beg leave to inscribe it to you, with the regard of

Yours sincerely,

**T. CAMPBELL.**



Charles Sanders  
Signed  
10-10-27

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## LIFE

OF

# MRS. SIDDONS.

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### CHAPTER. I.

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MRS. SIDDONS's maiden name was Kemble. She was the daughter of Roger Kemble, the manager of a theatrical company that performed chiefly in the midland and the western towns of England; and of Sarah Ward, whose father was also a strolling manager. Mr. Ward had been an actor in the days of Betterton, and had been the original *Hazareth*, in Fenton’s “Mariamne.”

I remember having seen the parents of the great actress in their old age. They were both of them tall and comely personages. The mother had a somewhat austere stateliness of manner; but it seems to have been from her that the family inherited their genius and force of character. Her voice had much of the emphasis of her daughter’s; and her portrait, which long graced Mrs. Siddons’s drawing-room, has an intellectual expression of the strongest power: she gave you

the idea of a Roman matron. The father had all the suavity of the old school of gentlemen.

Persons who cannot for a moment disjoin their idea of human dignity from that of station, will perhaps be surprised that I should speak of the dignified manners of a pair who lived by the humble vocation which I have mentioned. It is nevertheless true that the presence and demeanour of this couple might have graced a court; and though their relationship to Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble, of course, enhanced the interest which their venerable appearance commanded, yet I have been assured by those who knew them long before their children became illustrious, that in their humblest circumstances they always sustained an entire respectability. There are some individuals whom no circumstances can render vulgar, and Mr. and Mrs. Kemble were of this description. Besides, in spite of all our prejudices against the player's vocation, irreproachable personal character will always find its level in the general esteem.

Respecting Roger Kemble, Mrs. Siddons's father, I have not been able to make out any very interesting particulars. His wife alleged that he was an unparalleled *Falstaff*, but I know of no impartial testimony to the same effect. Ward disapproved of his daughter marrying an actor; and when he found that her union with Kemble was inevitable, he was with difficulty persuaded to speak to her. He then forgave her with all the bitterness of his heart, saying, "*Sarah, you have not disobeyed me: I told you never to marry an actor, and you have married a man who neither is nor ever can be an actor.*" This anecdote has been often mistold, and the same words inaccurately ascribed to Roger Kemble, on his daughter's marriage with Mr. Siddons.

Those who remember Roger Kemble describe him as a man of plain sense and of good-humoured and jocose disposition. His mildness made him more popular at home than his spouse, who, having a brood of high-mettled boys and Solomon's precept respecting the rod incessantly before her eyes, was rather a stern disciplinarian towards her masculine progeny. He was born in the city of Hereford, in 1721, and died in 1802, in his 82d year. When in poor circumstances, he used laughingly to console himself by alleging that he was come of a good house, though decayed. It was handed down in the family, that they were sprung from the Kembles of Wydell, in Wiltshire, a house of undoubted antiquity. I have not been able to prove this descent, even with the aid of my friend

Mr. Young, of the Herald's College. But still I am not inclined to disbelieve the general tradition, that their ancestors had once been wealthy and powerful. Their property, it was said, had been confiscated in Charles's civil war, and their misfortunes consummated by their adhesion to the Roman Catholic faith.

Though the gifted theatrical Kembles have no need of heraldic blazonry, yet still their family, like every other, has a right to its own traditional recollections ; and they still cherish the memory of two ancestral members, whose names are not wholly destitute of historical interest. The one was a soldier, the other a martyr.

In the description of the battle of Worcester it is mentioned, that "after the rout of the royal army, the Earl of Cleveland and some others rallied what force they could, though inconsiderable to the number of the republicans, and charged the enemy very gallantly, in Sudbury-street, where Sir James Hamilton and Captain Kemble were both desperately wounded, and others slain. Yet this action," the chronicler adds, "did much secure his majesty's march out at St. Martin's gate, who had otherwise been in danger of being taken in the town. For this service, Captain Kemble was rewarded by Charles the Second, after the Restoration, with the gift of a war-horse."

Another ancestral relative, who, I imagine, was the great-grand-uncle of Roger Kemble, was one of the last individuals in England who was publicly put to death for his religion.\* Some Church of England readers will possibly be shocked, or incredulous, when they are told that this poor man was murdered by Christians of their own persuasion : for it is but recently that the bulk of Englishmen have been forced to believe the historical fact, that their Protestant forefathers were nearly as stanch persecutors as the Catholics. No principle, so worthy of growth in the English mind, has taken root in it so slowly as a charitable and just spirit towards that body of believers. Even the soul of Milton could not raise itself entirely above intolerant sentiments. He deprecates the persecution of Catholics, but proposes that they should never be allowed the public exercise of their religion ; as if, restraining

\* It is not true, however, though sometimes asserted, that he was the very last of those who suffered for the Romish faith in England. The Reverend Oliver Plunket, titular bishop of Armagh, was hanged at Tyburn, 1681, two years after the death of Mr. Kemble : nor was the ceremony of taking out Plunket's heart and bowels omitted on this disgraceful occasion. Still later, a Father Attwood was sentenced, but reprieved and taken off the hurdle. Father Atkinson, a Franciscan friar, died a prisoner in Hurst castle, in 1729.

men from worshipping according to their creed were not the essence of persecution.

The martyr to whom I have alluded was the Reverend John Kemble, who, according to the diary of Douay College, was ordained a priest in February, 1625 ; and in the June following was sent upon the English mission ; after which, his usual residence was in the diocese of his native county of Hereford. He officiated as a priest for fifty-four years. In the fifty-fifth year after his ordination, and in the eightieth of his age, he was apprehended, and executed on the 2d of August, 1679.

A Mr. Jaby, who claims relationship with Mr. Charles Kemble, about two years ago addressed to that gentleman a letter, which is now before me ; in which he says, that their ancestral relation, the above priest, was compelled to walk from London to Hereford at the age of eighty, and that he was there burnt upon the stones. The manner of death here ascribed to him is, however, a mistake ; Mr. Jaby indeed contradicts it himself, by immediately adding, that the same Captain Kemble, the martyr's nephew who behaved so gallantly at Worcester, preserved one of his uncle's hands, which is kept to this day in the Worcester Catholic chapel. It would certainly tell more martyrologically that the old gentleman had suffered by fire, and at this moment it would make no difference to him ; but, in point of fact, no part of him was burnt, except his heart and bowels, after he was hanged, and when it is to be hoped he was insensible. Mr. Jaby says, in the same letter, that his brother possesses a likeness of the martyr, painted in oil, while he was in prison. The old man's fortitude is still a traditional by-word in the place. On his way to execution, he smoked his pipe and conversed with his friends ; and in that county it was long usual to call the last pipe that was smoked in a social company, a Kemble's pipe. I have heard that John Kemble and Mrs. Siddons once paid a visit together to the martyr's tomb ; though I know not at what time they made the pilgrimage. One would have gone far for a sight of their countenances on the spot.

The poor old man was apprehended at Pembridge castle, in the parish of Witchcastle, in Herefordshire, by a Captain Scudamore, of Kentchurch. He was apprized of his pursuers, but refused to abscond, saying, that in the course of nature he must die ere long, and that it would be better for him to die for his religion. He was committed to Hereford jail, but was cruelly and unnecessarily ordered up to London, on pretence

of implication in Titus Oates's plot ; and from thence sent back again to take his trial at Hereford. He was put on horseback for the journey, but his infirmities permitting him only to ride sideways, he was compelled to perform the greater part of it on foot. After his return to Hereford jail he was frequently visited by Captain Scudamore's children, whom he treated to whatever dainties were sent to him by his friends ; and when asked why he so petted his captor's children, he said, it was because their father was his best friend. He suffered on the field of Wigmarsh, close by Hereford. His last words from the cart were as follows : "It will be expected I should say something ; but, as I am an old man, it cannot be much. I have no concern in the plot, neither indeed do I believe that there is any. Oates and Bedloe, not being able to charge me with any thing when I was brought up to London, makes it evident that I die only for professing the old Roman Catholic religion, which was the religion that first made this kingdom Christian ; and whoever intends to be saved must die in that religion. I beg of all whom I have offended, either by thought, word, or deed, to forgive me, as I do heartily forgive all that have been instrumental or desirous of my death." He then turned to the executioner, and said, " Honest friend Anthony, do thine office ; thou wilt do me a greater kindness than discourtesy." After his death, Captain Kemble begged off his body, and buried it in the churchyard of Welsh Newton.

Mr. Roger Kemble being, like his ancestors, a Catholic, while his wife was a Protestant, it was arranged that their sons should be bred in the Catholic faith, and the daughters in that of their mother.\* Some of their children died in infancy, but

#### \* LIST OF THE KEMBLE FAMILY.

<p><b>ROGER KEMBLE</b>, born in the city of Hereford, March 1, 1721. Died 1802.</p>	<p><b>SARAH WARD</b>, born at Clonmell, in Ireland, September 2, 1735. Married R. Kemble, at Cirencester, 1753. Died 1806.</p>
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#### THEIR CHILDREN WERE,

1. **SARAH KEMBLE** (Mrs. Siddons), born at Brecon, July 5, 1755. Died in London, June 8, 1831.
2. **JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE**, born at Prescott, in Lancashire, February 1, 1757. Died at Lausanne, 1823.
3. **STEPHEN KEMBLE**, born at Rington, in Herefordshire, May 8, 1758. Died 1822.
4. **FRANCES KEMBLE**, born at Hereford, December 28, 1759. Died at Bath, in 1812.
5. **ELIZABETH KEMBLE**, born at Warrington, Lancashire, April 2, 1761. Alive in 1834.

three sons and five daughters arrived at adult years. John Philip Kemble, the eldest son, was born more than a year after Mrs. Siddons, and proved ultimately the greatest actor of his time on the English stage.

Roger Kemble always declared it to be his wish that his children should not follow his own vocation, and he gave the male part of them, at least, an education that might have made them independent of the stage. The sons were successively sent to the Catholic seminary at Douay, a school at that time inferior to none in Europe in discipline and tuition. They proved both of them accomplished men, whose acquirements did credit to their seminary.

I have not a doubt that Mr. and Mrs. Roger Kemble were anxious to prevent their children from becoming actors, and that they sought out other means of providing for them; but they made this attempt too late, that is, after their offspring had been accustomed to theatrical joyousness. For parents who are players themselves, it is hardly possible to keep their children from following the same life. The conversations—the readings—the books of the family—the learning of parts—the rehearsals at home—the gayety diffused by the getting-up of comic characters before they are acted, and the imposing dignity of tragic characters—the company—everything, indeed, which the children of play-acting parents hear and see, has a tendency to make them more prone to the stage than to any other such plodding and drudging occupations as the most of them would be otherwise destined to pursue.

Stephen Kemble accordingly, when put an apprentice to an apothecary, soon grew weary of the pestle and mortar, and attached himself to an itinerant company. He afterward migrated to Dublin, where his brother John was beginning to establish his fame. Harris, the manager of Covent Garden, anxious to be beforehand with Drury Lane, secretly despatched

6. MARY KEMBLE, born at Stratford-on-Avon, 1763. Died very young.
7. ANNE KEMBLE, born at Worcester, April, 1764. Alive in 1834.
8. CATHERINE KEMBLE, born at Hereford, July 4, 1765. Died very young.
9. LUCY KEMBLE, born at Worcester, July 28, 1767. Died young.
10. HENRY KEMBLE, born at Leominster, December 29, 1773. Died young.
11. CHARLES KEMBLE, born at Brecon, South Wales, November, 1775. Alive in 1834.
12. JANE KEMBLE, born at Warwick, September 30, 1777. Died very young.

an agent thither to bring over the great Kemble. The messenger, mistaking the large for the great brother, unfortunately engaged the former; and Stephen made his first appearance at Covent Garden, as *Othello*, in 1785. In the bills announcing that *debut*, Stephen was called Mr. Kemble. Whether or not the Covent Garden managers had already discovered their mistake, but wished to save other people from the pain of sharing it, certain it is that they got ample credit for an attempt to mystify the public, though the *debutante's* appearance, if not a triumph, was at least not a complete failure.\* This mistake of the managers produced many comic remarks, that would have been of great detriment to the tragic laurels of my friend Stephen, if his talents in the graver drama had been greater than they were. But though he was not the worst of tragedians, his forte was in comedy. He became afterward a member of the Haymarket theatre, where he played *Sir Christopher Curry*, in "Incle and Yarico," with great applause; but he relinquished London, in consequence of becoming manager at Edinburgh. There he had a long contest with Mrs. Esten, the mistress of the Duke of Hamilton, an actress of considerable celebrity, who laid claims to the management of the same theatre. She dropped them, however, for a stipulated sum. Some years afterward, Mr. Stephen Kemble removed from Edinburgh, to conduct the theatre of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; but he acted occasionally both in London and on the Scottish stage, and his *Falstaff* always drew full houses. I have seen him often act in Edinburgh in my boyish days, and if it was the prepossession of youth and strong personal friendship to believe him an unparalleled comedian, I would go a great way to enjoy the same illusion again. Joy comes to my heart at the recollection of his *Falstaff* and *Village Lawyer*; and the memory of the man who was pleasantness personified touches me with still deeper feelings. His accomplished daughter married the grandson of Sir Richard Arkwright. She is the authoress of many charming musical compositions.

Frances Kemble, the sister of Mrs. Siddons next in age to

\* In the *Morning Herald* of September, 1783, I find the following friendly notice:

"The Siddons and the Kemble were seated over the stage-box on Wednesday evening, the 24th, to see their brother Stephen Kemble's first appearance. Nature, whose effusions have in public secured to the former a universal admiration, operated very powerfully and frequently on this occasion. The tears of sensibility stole down her cheek, and with a sister's sympathy, spoke all the brother felt."

herself, married Francis Twiss, Esq., who is known to the public chiefly by an "Index to Shakspeare," on the plan of the Indexes in the *Usum Delphini* editions of the Classics, a very useful work. Their surviving son, Mr. Horace Twiss, was lately member of parliament for Wootton Bassett, and under-secretary of state for the Home Department.

Mrs. Siddons's next sister, Elizabeth, I am happy to say, is still alive; and to those who knew the great actress, she offers a striking and pleasing resemblance of her. She has a full share of the noble air and elocution of her departed sister, and more varied and amusing powers of conversation. Miss Elizabeth Kemble acted for some time at Drury Lane, till she married Charles Edward Whitelock, who was manager of the Theatre Royal at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He was a descendant of the great lawyer Whitelock, and was godson to the prince commonly called the Pretender. For this Jacobitical god-name, imposed upon him by others at his baptism, it is difficult to imagine any one less responsible than the bearer himself; and we should scarcely expect him to have been exposed to reproach for it at the end of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the celebrated Cooke, at that time an actor in Mr. Whitelock's troop, charged him with it at a public dinner that was given to the manager at Newcastle, and declared that it was impossible for the bearer of such a god-name to be a loyal subject. The company, however, took a different view of the matter, and showed his drunken accuser out of the room.

Mrs. Whitelock accompanied her husband in a professional expedition to America, where she acted for many years with eminent success, and realized a fortune; her popularity on the other side of the Atlantic having fairly supported a family resemblance to that of her sister at home. She played principally at Charleston and Philadelphia, and frequently before General Washington. That great man was by no means a stoic at the sight of tragedy; but he hated to be seen weeping, and always wiped the tears with his handkerchief hastily from his face. She had on one occasion other auditors who were no less disdainful of the melting mood than Washington, and who were themselves no uninteresting a spectacle while they sat as spectators. This was a group of Indians, who had come from their distant wildernesses to conclude a treaty with the United States' government. They were accompanied by an interpreter, as none of them knew a word of English. They came to the theatre of Philadelphia on an appointed night, and

were received with vociferous cheering. They were tall, dark, gaunt figures, in their native costume. With steady, slow steps they entered the stage-box, and, without noticing the audience, or seeming to hear their claps of welcome, they seated themselves, with their eyes fixed on the stage, as if they had had but one head. All the time of the principal piece they continued thus sitting like statues, with immovable tranquillity. But in the after-piece, an artificial elephant was introduced ; and it so electrified the sons of the forest, that they all started up on a sudden with an earnest cry. Little suspecting that the imagined mammoth was a harmless structure of sticks, and clouts, and pasteboard, with four stupid men for its legs, they demanded, through their interpreter, where this quadruped had been found. There had been once, they said, a great beast like this in the land of the Red Men ; but it had been slain, and they were fearful that the white men had brought a second mammoth over the Big Lake in order to eat the Indians. After some time, they were appeased by an assurance that the great beast was as harmless as a squirrel, and that they should see him to-morrow by daylight. Accordingly, they were taken behind the scenes next morning, and initiated in the mysteries of its construction. A European would have laughed at the discovery, but the Red Men maintained an imperturbable gravity. They could not leave the house, however, without asking the manager for a mighty favour—namely, that they might be allowed to approach the heavenly women who had appeared on the stage last night, and to salute them. When this was reported in the green-room, it spread dismay among the actresses ; but it was represented to them that there was a general wish among the Americans to conciliate the Indians, that the popularity of the company might be injured by offending the swarthy strangers, and that their request, after all, had been made in no immodest spirit, and might be complied with without the least degradation on the part of the ladies. Some of the heavenly women, therefore, allowed a kiss to their savage admirers, who took no further liberty. Mrs. Whitelock was about to go through the same ceremony, when a fit of shyness came over her, and she shrank from the salute of the chief who came up to her. But the most polished gentleman, she said, could not have behaved with more delicate courtesy than this blanketed Indian. He put his hand to his breast, bowed respectfully, and retired.

All the Indian diplomatists, however, were not endowed with the same polite gallantry. One day, Mrs. Whitelock observed

one of them eying and following her at a distance in the streets of Philadelphia. Her house was situated out of the town, and she had to cross an unfrequented common before she could reach it. At the suburbs there were several negroes, who were selling fruit, and she offered a dollar to any one of them who would accompany her home, and protect her from the approaching Indian. But the blacks, who are free in that part of the States, only laughed at her distress ; so she had to post all alone over the common, like another Daphne, with her copper Apollo in interesting proximity behind her. At last, in a panting panic, she got home just in time to shut the gate in his face ; and before she had well recovered to tell the cause of her fright, the pursuer had disappeared. But the same evening, while Mr. Whitelock and she were at supper, a crash, like the stroke of a battering-ram, was heard at the garden-gate. The Indian had burst it open by throwing a large stone against it, and her picturesque admirer was seen, by moonlight, deliberately walking up the avenue towards the house. Mr. Whitelock immediately took down a sabre and firearms, but he had no occasion to use them ; for an athletic young Englishman, who lived in the house, rushed out, and repaid the intruder for his crash at the door by a stroke upon his jaw that was almost equally audible. The savage took his punishment very quietly, and, after one flooring, got up and walked back to Philadelphia.

To return to the immediate subject of these memoirs :—our great actress's birth-place was Brecon, or Brecknon, in South Wales. A friend has obligingly written to me as follows respecting the house in which Mrs. Siddons was born : “ It is a public-house in the high street of this town, which still retains its appellation, ‘ The Shoulder of Mutton,’ though now entirely altered from its pristine appearance. I perfectly well remember seeing it stand, with its gable front, projecting upper floors, and a rich, well-fed shoulder of mutton painted over the door, offering an irresistible temptation to the sharpened appetites of the Welsh farmers who frequented the adjoining market-place ; especially as within-doors the same, or some similar object in a more substantial shape, was always, at the accustomed hour, seen roasting at the kitchen fire, on a spit turned by a dog in a wheel, the invariable mode in all Breconian kitchens. In addition to which noontide entertainment for country guests, there was abundance of Welsh ale of the rarest quality ; and, as the ‘ Shoulder of Mutton’ was situated in the centre of Brecon, it was much resorted to by the neighbouring inhabit-

ants of the borough. If I am rightly informed, old Kemble was neither an unwilling nor an unwelcome member of their jolly associations. Those who remember him tell me that he was a man of respectable family, and of some small hereditary property in Herefordshire ; and that having married the daughter of a provincial manager, he received a company of strolling players for her dowry, and set up as a manager himself."

Brecnac, as far as I can learn, could never boast in modern times of having produced any other distinguished individuals than Mrs. Siddons and Charles Kemble ; yet the place is not without its interesting historical, and even dramatic associations. It was the first ground in Wales on which the Anglo-Norman banner intruded ; and the gray moss-grown cairns upon its mountains are still the acknowledged resting-places of British warriors, whose memory is preserved in the songs of the ancient language of Britain. The last prince of Brecnac, Bleddyn, who died fighting *pro aris et focis* against the Anglo-Normans, was the descendant of Sir Caradoc Bris Bras, one of the heroes of old French romance.

In the fifteenth century, the lordship of Brecon fell into the possession of the Staffords, Dukes of Buckingham, one of whom acts a conspicuous part in Shakspeare's "Richard the Third."

### *Buckingham.*

" And is it thus repays he my deep service  
 With such contempt ? Made I him king for this ?  
 Oh ! let me think on Hastings, and begone  
 To Brecnac while my fearful head is on."

*Act IV. Sc. 2.*

It was in the castle of Brecnac that Buckingham, in concert with Moreton, Bishop of Ely, plotted the rebellion in favour of Richmond.

### *Catesby.*

" Bad news, my lord : Moreton is fled to Richmond,  
 And Buckingham, backed by the hardy Welshmen,  
 Is in the field ; and still his power increaseth."

*Act IV. Sc. 3.*

It appears, however, that Buckingham was no great favourite with the Breconians and other Welshmen ; for, after having followed him to the banks of the Severn, they left him to be taken by the adherents of Richard, who beheaded him without

ceremony. The fact of so powerful a nobleman having been so wholly abandoned by his followers would imply that the authority of the feudal lords had not been established in Wales to the same extent as in the rest of the kingdom, and probably never existed at all much beyond the limits of the boroughs and fortified towns. Soon after, when the Earl of Richmond landed at Milford Haven, he being a Tudor and of Welsh extraction, the natives of the principality flocked to his standard, and contributed to the victory of Bosworth.

Brecon has also furnished a character for the drama of Shakespeare, namely, that of *Sir Hugh Evans*, that “*remnant of Welsh flannel*,” in “*The Merry Wives of Windsor*.” He was curate of the priory of Brecon in the days of Queen Elizabeth. He died in 1581, and by a will, which is still among the records of Brecon, left a library which must have been at that time thought considerable, and which bespeaks him to have been a man of reading. In the same will, he bequeaths his swash-buckler to one of his friends, and appoints Richard Price, Esq., to be overseer of his testament. The last-named gentleman was the son of Sir John Price, of the Priory,\* a great patron of Sir Hugh Evans. By the younger Price, Evans was presented, in 1572, to the living of Merthyr Cynog, and was doubtless introduced also to Shakspeare. At least so says my learned Cambrian friend;† who adds, that this Richard Price was a favourite at the court of Elizabeth; and, on the authority of the family records, is stated to have held a correspondence with Shakspeare. It is so delightful to identify any thing appertaining to the poet of poets with the birth-place of our heroine, that I am fain to indulge a pleasing belief in the probability of what my correspondent says farther. He states “that, from the intimacy which subsisted betwixt Shakspeare and the Prices of the Priory, an idea prevails that he frequently visited them at their residence in Brecon, and that he not only availed himself of the whimsicalities of old Sir Hugh, but that he was indebted to this part of the kingdom for much of the machinery of ‘*Midsummer Night’s Dream*.’ This idea is confirmed by the similarity which the frolics of *Puck* and his companions bear to the goblins and fairies of this portion of the principality; there being in Bre-

\* Sir John Price is well known among the Welsh as an antiquary. He took an active part in the union of Wales with England, and is supposed to have dictated the petition of his countrymen to Henry the Eighth.

† The Rev. T. Price, of Crickhowell.

monshire a valley which bears his name, Cwm Pwica. Here this merry sprite is said still to practise his gambols with all the energies of the sixteenth century ; and certainly if beautiful scenery have any influence in localizing these beings, they could find few better places than the deep romantic glen of the Clydach."

In the Memoranda which she has left me, Mrs. Siddons says nothing of her juvenile days ; but I remember her telling an anecdote of her infancy, which strongly illustrated her confidence in the efficacy of prayer, or rather of the Prayer-book. One day, her mother had promised to take her out the following, to a pleasure party in the neighbourhood, and she was to wear a new pink dress, which became her exceedingly. But whether the party was to hold, and the pink apparel to be worn, was to depend on the weather of to-morrow morning. On going to bed, she took with her her Prayer-book, opened, as she supposed, at the prayer for fine weather, and she fell asleep with the book folded in her little arms. At daybreak she found that she had been holding the prayer for rain to her breast, and that the rain, as if Heaven had taken her at her word, was pelting at the windows. But she went to bed again, with the book opened at the right place, and she found the mistake quite remedied ; for the morning was as pink and beautiful as the dress she was to wear.

I have heard her say that Milton's poetry was the object of her admiration earlier than Shakspeare's, and that when but ten years old she used to pore over "Paradise Lost" for hours together. Some portion of this Miltonic devotion may have sprung from piety more than taste ; for, without disparagement to the bard of Eden be it said, we are awed into idolatry of him by the sacredness of his subject, before we can appreciate his beauties.

Mrs. Siddons continued devoted to Milton all her life ; and she was one of the most judicious critics you could hear discourse of him. No doubt, when she thought, in her later days, of making "Paradise Lost" more popular by her readings, she miscalculated even her own powers of recitation. The best reading can do little or nothing for great poetry that is not dramatic ; and the muse of Milton is too proud to borrow a debt from elocution.

I am unable to state the exact date of Mrs. Siddons's first appearance on the stage, but it must have been very early ; for the company was offended at her appearance of childhood, and was for some time shaken with uproar. The timid *debutante*

was about to retire, when her mother, with characteristic decision, led her to the front of the stage, and made her repeat the fable of the "Boys and the Frogs," which not only appeased the audience, but produced thunders of applause. At thirteen, she was the heroine in several English operas, and sung very tolerably. In the "History of Worcester," there is found the copy of a play-bill, dated February 12, 1767, in which Mr. Roger Kemble announces his company of comedians as playing at the King's Head, in that city; with a concert of music. The play was "Charles the First," by an actor named Havard, indifferently written, and, from its subject, ill calculated for the universal sympathy of a British audience.\* The characters were thus cast: *James, Duke of Richmond*, by Mr. Siddons, who was now an actor in Kemble's company; *James, Duke of York*, by Master John Kemble, who was then about twelve years old. *The Young Princess*, by Miss Kemble, then approaching to fourteen; *Lady Fairfax*, by Mrs. Kemble. *Singing between the acts*, by Mr. Fowler and Miss Kemble. In the April following, Master John Kemble is announced as *Philidel*, in "King Arthur," and Miss Kemble as *Ariel*, in "The Tempest."

Her education could not be expected, from her father's circumstances, to be very accomplished; but it included instruction both in vocal and instrumental music. Her father also remarked that she had fine natural powers of elocution, and he wished them to be cultivated by regular tuition. For this purpose, when she was about fifteen, he engaged a stranger to be her reading preceptor, who would have undertaken the office if Mrs. Kemble had not interposed her veto. This individual was William Combe, recently known as the author of "Doctor Syntax's Adventures." This eccentric being, after mis-spending a handsome fortune, had come to Wolverhampton as a common soldier, and, after obtaining his discharge, and pecuniary relief from some friendly people in the place, had set up

\* Havard undertook the tragedy of "Charles I." at the desire of the manager of the company of Lincoln's Inn Fields, to which he then belonged, in 1737. The manager had probably read of the salutary effects produced on the genius of Euripides by seclusion in his cave, and he was determined to give Havard the same advantage in a garret during the composition of his task. He invited him to his house, took him up to one of its airiest apartments, and there locked him up for so many hours every day, well knowing his desultory habits; nor released him, after he had once turned the *clavis tragica*, till the unfortunate bard had repeated through the keyhole a certain number of new speeches in the progressive tragedy.

as a teacher of elocution. Roger Kemble had promised him a pupil in his eldest daughter, and went home to boast of the accomplished tutor he had engaged. But Mrs. Kemble more wisely determined that such an adventurer should not give lessons to her child.\*

\* Mr. Combe's history is not less remarkable for the recklessness of his early days than for the industry of his maturer age, and the late period of life at which he attracted popularity by his talents. He was the nephew of a Mr. Alexander, an alderman of the city of London; and, as he was sent first to Eton College, and afterward to Oxford, it may be inferred that his parents were in good circumstances. His uncle left him sixteen thousand pounds. On the acquisition of this fortune he entered himself of the Temple, and in due time was called to the bar. On one occasion he even distinguished himself before the Lord-chancellor Nottingham. But his ambition was to shine as a man of fashion, and he paid little attention to the law. While at the Temple, his courtly dress, his handsome liveries, and, it may be added, his tall stature and fine appearance, procured him the appellation of Duke Combe. Some of the most exclusive ladies of fashion had instituted a society, which was called the Coterie, to which gentlemen were admitted as visitors. Among this favoured number was the Duke Combe. One evening, Lady Archer, who was a beautiful woman, but too fond of gaudy colours, and who had her face always lavishly rouged, was sitting in the Coterie, when Lord Lyttleton, the graceless son of an estimable peer, entered the room evidently intoxicated, and stood before Lady Archer for several minutes, with his eyes fixed on her. The lady manifested great indignation, and asked why he thus annoyed her. "I have been thinking," said Lord Lyttleton, "what I can compare you to, in your gaudy colouring, and you give me no idea but that of a drunken peacock." The lady returned a sharp answer, on which he threw the contents of a wine-glass in her face. All was confusion in a moment; but, though several noblemen and gentlemen were present, none of them took up the cause of the insulted female till Mr. Combe came forward, and, by his resolute behaviour, obliged the offender to withdraw. His spirited conduct on this occasion gained him much credit among the circles of fashion; but his grace's diminishing finances ere long put an end to the fashionableness of his acquaintance. He paid all the penalties of a spendthrift, and was steeped in poverty to the very lips. At one time he was driven for a morsel of bread to enlist as a private in the British army; and at another time, in a similar exigency, he went into the French service. From a more cogent motive than piety, he afterward entered into a French monastery, and lived there till the term of his novitiate expired. He returned to Britain, and took service wherever he could get it; but in all these dips into low life, he was never in the least embarrassed when he met with his old acquaintance. A wealthy divine, who had known him in the best London society, recognised him when a waiter at Swansea, actually tripping about with a napkin under his arm, and, staring at him, exclaimed, "You cannot be Combe?"— "Yes, indeed, but I am," was the waiter's answer. He married the mistress of a noble lord, who promised him an annuity with her, but cheated him; and in revenge he wrote a spirited satire, entitled "The Diaboliad." Among its subjects were an Irish peer and his eldest son, who

When she was about seventeen, Mr. Siddons, who was still an actor in her father's company, paid his first attentions to her ; it was soon perceived that they were acceptable. Mr. Siddons had been bred to business in Birmingham ; but, being handsome and active, and not without versatile talents for the stage,

had a quarrel that extinguished any little natural affection that might have ever subsisted between them. The father challenged the son to fight ; the son refused to go out with him, not, as he expressly stated, because the challenger was his own father, but because he was *not a gentleman*.

After his first wife's death, Mr. Combe made a more creditable marriage with a sister of Mr. Cosway, the artist, and much of the distress which his imprudence entailed upon him was mitigated by the assiduities of this amiable woman. For many years he subsisted by writing for the booksellers, with a reputation that might be known to many individuals, but that certainly was not public. He wrote a work, which was generally ascribed to the good Lord Lyttleton, entitled "Letters from a Nobleman to his Son," and "Letters from an Italian Nun to an English Nobleman," that professed to be translated from Rousseau. He published also several political tracts, that were trashy, time-serving, and scurrilous. Pecuniary difficulties brought him to a permanent residence in the King's Bench, where he continued about twenty years, and for the latter part of them a voluntary inmate. One of his friends offered to effect a compromise with his creditors, but he refused the favour. "If I compounded with my creditors," said Mr. Combe, "I should be obliged to sacrifice the little substance which I possess, and on which I subsist in prison. These chambers, the best in the Bench, are mine at the rent of a few shillings a week, in right of my seniority as a prisoner. My habits are become so sedentary, that if I lived in the airiest square of London, I should not walk round it once in a month. I am contented in my cheap quarters."

When he was near the age of seventy he had some literary dealings with Mr. Ackermann, the bookseller. The late caricaturist Rowlandson had offered to Mr. Ackermann a number of drawings, representing an old clergyman and schoolmaster, who felt, or fancied, himself in love with the fine arts, quixotically travelling during his holydays in quest of the picturesque. As the drawings needed the explanation of letter-press, Mr. Ackermann declined to purchase them unless he should find some one who could give them a poetical illustration. He carried one or two of them to Mr. Combe, who undertook the subject. The bookseller, knowing his procrastinating temper, left him but one drawing at a time, which he illustrated in verse, without knowing the subject of the drawing that was next to come. The popularity of the "Adventures of Dr. Syntax" induced Mr. Ackermann afterward to employ him in two successive publications, "The Dance of Life," and "The Dance of Death," in England, which were also accompanied by Rowlandson's designs.

It was almost half a century before the appearance of these works that Mr. Combe so narrowly missed the honour of being Mrs. Siddons's reading-master. He had exchanged the gayeties of London for quarters at a tap-room in Wolverhampton, where he was billeted as a soldier in the service of his Britannic majesty. He had a bad foot at the time, and was

as his range of characters extended from *Hamlet* to *Harlequin*, he acquired provincial popularity as an actor. The people of Brecon even took an interest in his attachment to Miss Kemble, especially at one period, when he thought himself threatened with a disappointment. At this crisis, Mr. Siddons made a public statement of his case, which, though it flowed in rhyme, might possibly contain more rhyme than reason. He alleged that, though he had been accepted by Miss Kemble with the approbation of her parents, they had suddenly forbidden his pretensions, on the prospect of a wealthy neighbouring squire being about to solicit her hand, and that the young lady herself had acquiesced in their decision. The object of Mr. Siddons's terrors and jealousy was a Mr. Evans, of Pennant, a gentleman who, at that time, had an estate near Brecon, though he lived to consume it, and died an insolvent bachelor. It is still remembered by some survivors at Brecon, that this Mr. Evans was rumoured to have fallen in love with Miss Kemble on hearing her sing an opera song, "Sweet Robin," with peculiarly fascinating effect; and people expected that he would ask her in marriage. Of the instability of Miss Kemble's affection, however, there is not the slightest proof beyond the word of a jealous lover; and, though Mr. and Mrs. Kemble might well grudge their lovely daughter to a fellow-stroller, we are not

limping painfully along the high street of the town, when he was met by an acquaintance who had known him in all his fashionable glory. This individual had himself seen better days, having exchanged a sub-lieutenancy of marines for a strollership in Mr. Kemble's company. "Heavens!" said the astonished histrion, "is it possible, Combe, that you can bear this condition?"—"Fiddlesticks!" answered the ex-duke, taking a pinch of snuff, "a philosopher can bear any thing." The player ere long introduced him to Mr. Roger Kemble; but, by this time, Mr. Combe had become known in the place through his conversational talents. A gentleman, passing through the public-house, had observed him reading, and, looking over his shoulder, saw with surprise a copy of Horace. "What," said he, "my friend, can you read that book in the original?"—"If I cannot," replied Combe, "a great deal of money has been thrown away on my education." His landlord soon found the literary red-coat an attractive ornament to his tap-room, which was filled every night with the wondering auditors of the learned soldier. They treated him to gratuitous potations, and clubbed their money to procure his discharge. Roger Kemble gave him a benefit night at the theatre, and Combe promised to speak an address on the occasion. In this address, he noticed the various conjectures that had been circulated respecting his real name and character; and, after concluding the enumeration, he said, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, I shall tell you what I am." While expectation was all agog, he added, "I am—ladies and gentlemen, your most obedient humble servant." He then bowed, and left the stage.

to take Mr. Siddons's song as evidence of their culpability.\* Mr. Siddons proposed to his beloved an immediate elopement,

\* The following was the song sung by Mr. Siddons on this occasion, entitled "The Discarded Lover."

1.

"Ye ladies of Brecon, whose hearts ever feel  
For wrongs like to this I'm about to reveal,  
Excuse the first product, nor pass unregarded  
The complaints of poor Colin, a lover *discarded*.

2.

"When first on the shore of fair Cambria he trod,  
His devotion was paid to the blind little god,  
Whose aid and assistance each day he'd implore  
To grant him his Phyllis—he wanted no more.

3.

"No cloud seemed to threaten, each bar was removed :  
The father, though silent, with silence approved :  
The mother, at last, bestowed her assent,  
When Phyllis seemed pleased, and Colin content.

4.

"Secure, as he thought, in a treasure so dear,  
Neither duke, lord, nor squire had he reason to fear ;  
But, oh ! strange the reverse to all things brought about,  
For the last undersigned has poor Colin thrown out.

5.

"Common fame, who we all are informed is a liar,  
Reported of late that a wealthy young squire  
Had received from the fair an invincible dart,  
And "Robin, sweet robin," had thrill'd through his heart.

6.

"At length the report reach'd the ears of his flame,  
Whose nature he fear'd from the source whence it came ;  
She acquainted her ma, who, her ends to obtain,  
Determin'd poor Colin to drive from the plain.

7.

"Not easily turn'd, she her project pursued,  
Each part of the shepherd was instantly viewed ;  
And the charms of three hundred a year, some say more,  
Made her find out a thousand she ne'er saw before.

8.

"Poor Colin, whose fame bids all slander defiance,  
Could not help being moved at their talk'd-of alliance ;  
The means so alluring, so tempting the bait,  
Thus Colin consider'd and dreaded his fate.

9.

"Yet still on his Phyllis his hopes were all placed,  
That her vows were so firm they could ne'er be effac'd ;  
But soon she convinced him 'twas all a mere joke,  
For duty rose up, and her vows were all broke.

who, tempering amatory with filial duty, declined the proposal. The impatient lover then became so impetuous in his language to her parents, that he received his dismissal, for the time being, from Mr. Kemble's company as an actor. He was allowed, however, to have a benefit, and the people of Brecon gave him a bumper house. At the conclusion of the play, he sang the song of his own composition already mentioned, which does no remarkable credit either to his delicacy or poetical genius. But it described the pangs of his own attachment, the coldness of Miss Kemble, and the perfidy of her parents ; and, indifferent as the effusion was, it was greeted by the audience with all the Welsh warmth of their hearts. Their applause were still resounding, after his last bow, when Colin, retiring into the green-room, was met by the stately mother of Miss Kemble, who was fully prepared to avenge the honour of the family, and crowned Mr. Siddons's benefit by boxing his ears very heartily..

How the feud was healed I know not ; but the event proved that Mr. Siddons was cured of his jealousy. Miss Kemble promised to marry him as soon as her father and mother's objections could be overcome. Meanwhile, she agreed to go from home, and lived for some time under the protection of Mrs. Greatheed, of Guy's Cliff, in Warwickshire. From a surviving member of that family I learn that she came into it in a dependent capacity ; and, though she was much liked, that her great latent genius was not even suspected. It was observed, however, that she passionately admired Milton ; and I have seen a copy of his works, which the Greatheeds presented to her at this period. This circumstance is at variance with a rumour often repeated, I have no doubt with a charitable wish to make her early days appear as vulgar as possible, namely, that she went as a nursery-maid into the house at Guy's Cliff. Families rarely present their nurse-maids with copies of Milton's poetry ; and, besides, there were at that time no children

## 10.

“Dear ladies, avoid one indelible stain,  
Excuse me, I beg, if my verse is too plain ;  
But a jilt is the devil, as has long been confess'd,  
Which a heart like poor Colin's must ever detest.

## 11.

“Now your pardon he begs, as your pity he might,  
But here 'tis confess'd you have shown it to-night ;  
For his merits, though small, you have amply rewarded,  
To accept the poor thanks of a lover discarded.”

to be nursed in the Greatheed family. Her station with them was humble, but not servile, and her principal employment was to read to the elder Mr. Greatheed.

The younger Mr. Greatheed at that time was, I believe, about twelve years of age. His recollections of Mrs. Siddons, and her future history, gave him an interest in our great actress that lasted for life. George Greatheed, though unsuccessful as a poet, was a most honourable and estimable man. He wrote the "Regent," an indifferent tragedy, and having joined the *Della Cruscans*, came under the savage vituperation of Gifford. But his scathed laurels never lowered him in Mrs. Siddons's regard.

While she remained at Guy's Cliff she received several visits from Mr. Siddons; and her parents, seeing that the attachment was serious, ceased to oppose it. In her nineteenth year she was united to the object of her choice, her own father giving her away. They were married at Trinity Church, Coventry, November 26, 1773; and on the 4th of the October following, their eldest son, Henry, was born at Wolverhampton.

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## CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Siddons acts at Cheltenham—Meets with the Hon. Miss Boyle, afterward Lady O'Neil—Is invited by Garrick to Drury Lane—Appears as *Portia*—Has indifferent Success—Is dismissed from Drury Lane by a Letter from the Prompter—Retires to the Provincial Theatres, where she is popular—Her future Greatness predicted by Henderson—Is admired at Bath, and from thence recalled to Drury Lane.

In the course of the year 1774, Mr. and Mrs. Siddons were both engaged to act at Cheltenham. That place, though now an opulent and considerable town, consisted in those days of only one tolerable street, through the middle of which ran a clear stream of water, with stepping-stones that served as a bridge. At that time, the Honourable Miss Boyle, the only daughter of Lord Dungarvon, a most accomplished woman, and authoress of several pleasing poems, one of which, "An Ode to the Poppy," was published by Charlotte Smith, happened to be at Cheltenham. She had come, accompanied by her mother and her mother's second husband, the Earl of Ayles-

bury. One morning that she and some other fashionables went to the box-keeper's office, they were told that the tragedy to be performed that evening was "Venice Preserved." They all laughed heartily, and promised themselves a treat of the ludicrous, in the misrepresentation of the piece. Some one who overheard their mirth kindly reported it to Mrs. Siddons. She had the part of *Belvidera* allotted to her, and prepared for the performance of it with no very enviable feelings. It may be doubted, indeed, whether Otway had imagined in *Belvidera* a personage more to be pitied than her representative now thought herself. The rabble, in "Venice Preserved," showed compassion for the heroine, and, when they saw her feather-bed put up to auction, "*governed their roaring throats, and grumbled pity.*" But our actress anticipated refined scorners, more pitiless than the rabble; and the prospect was certainly calculated to prepare her more for the madness than the dignity of her part. In spite of much agitation, however, she got through it. About the middle of the piece she heard some unusual and apparently suppressed noises, and therefore concluded that the fashionables were in the full enjoyment of their anticipated amusement, tittering and laughing, as she thought, with unmerciful derision. She went home after the play, grievously mortified. Next day, however, Mr. Siddons met in the street with Lord Aylesbury, who inquired after Mrs. Siddons's health, and expressed not only his own admiration of her last night's exquisite acting, but related its effects on the ladies of his party. They had wept, he said, so excessively, that they were unpresentable in the morning, and were confined to their rooms with headaches. Mr. Siddons hastened home to gladden his fair spouse with this intelligence. Miss Boyle soon afterward visited Mrs. Siddons at her lodgings, took the deepest interest in her fortunes, and continued her ardent friend till her death. She married Lord O'Neil, of Shane's Castle, in Ireland. It is no wonder that Mrs. Siddons dwells with tenderness in her Memoranda on the name of this earliest encourager of her genius. Miss Boyle was a beauty of the first order, and gifted with a similar mind, as her poetry and her patronage of the hitherto unnoticed actress evince; though patronage is too cold a word for the friendship which she bestowed on so interesting an object. Though the powers of the latter were, by her own confession, still crude, yet her noble young friend consoled and cheered her; and with the prophetic eye of taste, foresaw her glory. Miss Boyle took

upon her the direction of her wardrobe, enriched it from her own, and made many of her dresses with her own hands.

Mrs. Siddons continues thus in her Autograph Recollections : “ Mr. King, by order of Mr. Garrick, who had heard some account of me from the Aylesbury family, came to Cheltenham to see me in the ‘ Fair Penitent.’ I knew neither Mr. King nor his purpose ; but I shortly afterward received an invitation from Garrick himself, upon very low terms. Happy to be placed where I presumptuously augured that I should do all that I have since achieved, if I could but once gain the opportunity, I instantly paid my respects to the great man. I was at that time good-looking ; and certainly, all things considered, an actress well worth my poor five pounds a week. His praises were most liberally conferred upon me ; but his attentions, great and unremitting as they were, ended in worse than nothing.—How was all this admiration to be accounted for, consistently with his subsequent conduct ? Why, thus, I believe : He was retiring from the management of Drury Lane, and, I suppose, at that time wished to wash his hands of all its concerns and details. I moreover had served what I believe was his chief object in the exaltation of poor me,—and that was the mortification and irritation of Mrs. Yates and Miss Younge, whose consequence and troublesome airs were, it must be confessed, enough to try his patience. As he had now almost withdrawn from it, the interests of the theatre grew, I suppose, rather indifferent to him. However that may have been, he always objected to my appearance in any very prominent character, telling me that the forenamed ladies would poison me if I did. I, of course, thought him not only an oracle, but my friend ; and, in consequence of his advice, *Portia*, in the ‘ Merchant of Venice,’ was fixed upon for my *debut* ; a character in which it was not likely that I should excite any great sensation—*I was, therefore, merely tolerated.* The fulsome adulation that courted Garrick in the theatre cannot be imagined ; and whosoever was the luckless wight who should be honoured by his distinguished and envied smiles, of course became an object of spite and malevolence. Little did I imagine that I myself was now that wretched victim. He would sometimes hand me from my own seat in the green-room to place me next to his own. He also selected me to personate *Venus*, at the revival of the ‘ Jubilee.’ This gained me the malicious appellation of Garrick’s *Venus* ; and the ladies who so kindly bestowed it on me rushed before me in the last scene, so that if he (Mr. Garrick) had not brought us

forward with him with his own hands, my little Cupid\* and myself, whose appointed situations were in the very front of the stage, might have as well been in the Island of Paphos at that moment. Mr. Garrick would also flatter me, by sending me into one of the boxes, when he acted any of his great characters. In short, his attentions were enough to turn an older and wiser head. He promised Mr. Siddons to procure me a good engagement with the new managers, and desired him to give himself no trouble about the matter, but to put my cause entirely into his hands. He let me down, however, after all these protestations, in the most humiliating manner ; and, instead of doing me common justice with those gentlemen, rather depreciated my talents. This Mr. Sheridan afterward told me ; and said that, when Mrs. Abingdon heard of my impending dismissal, she told them they were all acting like fools. When the London season was over, I made an engagement at Birmingham for the ensuing summer, little doubting of my return to Drury Lane for the next winter ; but while I was fulfilling my engagement at Birmingham, to my utter dismay and astonishment I received an official letter from the prompter of Drury Lane, acquainting me that my services would be no longer required. It was a stunning and cruel blow, overwhelming all my ambitious hopes, and involving peril, even to the subsistence of my helpless babes.† It was very near destroying me. My blighted prospects, indeed, induced a state of mind that preyed upon my health, and for a year and a half I was supposed to be hastening to a decline. For the sake of my poor children, however, I roused myself to shake off this despondency, and my endeavours were blessed with success, in spite of the degradation I had suffered in being banished from Drury Lane as a worthless candidate for fame and fortune."

These sentences, which were penned by Mrs. Siddons in her advanced age, show that neither a long lifetime, nor most forgiving habits of mind, had effaced the poignant feelings which this transaction had inflicted on her ; and those who knew her best will have the most implicit belief in her veracity.

\* This little Cupid was the subsequent biographer Thomas Dibdin. He told me that, as it was necessary for him to smile in the part of his godship, Mrs. Siddons kept him in humour by asking him what sort of sugar-plums he liked best, and promising him a large supply of them. After the performance she kept her word.

† Her eldest daughter, Sarah Martha, was born at Gloucester, Nov. 5, 1775, within two months before Mrs. Siddons's first appearance in London.

Her statement, however, I think, shows that Garrick behaved to her rather like a man of the world than with absolute treachery. One traces in his conduct more of that thoughtlessness which the French call "*une heureuse légèreté*," than of any bad meaning. It is utterly improbable that he was ever jealous of her genius, or that he sought to keep it back from popularity, for fear of its eclipsing his own. At that time she had not risen (at least in the common opinion) to rivalry with players far inferior to Garrick. His culpability, in failing to keep his promise to Mrs. Siddons as to her engagement, cannot be very definitely measured. In leaving so complicated a concern as Drury Lane, he might be obliged to sacrifice his influence. For the fact of his having depreciated her talents to the managers, we have only the testimony of Sheridan, who probably found her mind irritated on the subject, and was a man much disposed to say to a beautiful woman whatever was likely to fall in with her prevailing mood. When Garrick ceased to be the manager of Drury Lane, he ceased to have the power of dictating engagements. Still it were to be wished that he had left the affair explained.

Mr. Boaden, in his Life of our great actress, asserts, that some years previous to her *debut* on the London boards, she made a private application to Garrick, as manager of Drury Lane, soliciting first his judgment, and secondly his protection. She repeated, according to Mr. Boaden, some of the speeches of "Jane Shore" before the manager. "He seemed highly pleased with her elocution and deportment, wondered how she could have got rid of the provincial *ti-tum-ti*, but regretted he could do nothing for her, and wished her a good morning."

I have strong doubts with regard to this anecdote. The scene of it is laid in London; and I have heard Mrs. Siddons herself say, that she never was in London before her invitation from Garrick, in 1775. At the time alleged, she was in the family of the Greaheads, and the surviving members of that family have no recollection either of Mrs. Siddons's having left them, or of their having removed from Guy's Cliff, during her abode with them.

It was on Friday, the 29th of December, 1775, that Mrs. Siddons made her first appearance on the London boards, in the character of *Portia*, in the "Merchant of Venice." She was announced merely as a young lady, whose performances had met with great applause. The part of *Portia* was manifestly too gay for Mrs. Siddons under the appalling ordeal of a first appearance in London. She played it, to be sure, many

years afterward with very fair success; but that was when her triumphs had given her strength. The nobleness of her form, and the energy of her acting, made her appear constitutionally strong; but she was far from being so, and her nerves were of the most delicate texture. By looking at the note appended to page 35, it will be seen that her health could not now be very robust. She had thus to throw the first die for her fame in a sprightly and half-comic part, under disadvantages both physical and moral.

The great obstacle to the early development of her powers, I have heard Mrs. Siddons declare, was timidity. The following critique on her first appearance at Drury Lane will exemplify the truth of this acknowledgment, though it equally convicts the vile newspaper critic of insensibility to the real cause of her failure in the part. The scribbler acknowledges that she delivered the great speech to *Shylock* with the most critical propriety, though he had not the charity to ascribe her tremulous tones to diffidence,—the most pardonable of all faults, because the most indicative of sensibility. In describing her appearance, the newsman says, “On before us tottered, rather than walked, a very pretty, delicate, fragile-looking young creature, dressed in a most unbecoming manner, in a faded salmon-coloured sack and coat, and uncertain whereabouts to fix either her eyes or her feet. She spoke in a broken, tremulous tone; and at the close of a sentence her words generally lapsed into a horrid whisper, that was absolutely inaudible. After her first exit, the buzzing comment went round the pit generally. She certainly is very pretty, but then how awkward, and what a shocking dresser! Towards the famous trial-scene, she became more collected, and delivered the great speech to *Shylock* with the most critical propriety, but still with a faintness of utterance which seemed the result rather of internal physical weakness than of a deficiency of spirit or feeling. Altogether, the impression made upon the audience by this first effort was of the most negative nature.”

She repeated the character of *Portia* a few nights afterward, but with no greater effect. She then waited until the 13th of January, 1776, for one of the ladies collegiate, in Ben Jonson’s “*Epicœne*,” which had been restored to the stage by Colman.

Soon after, in the same season, she acted a part, of trifling moment, in an opera, called “*The Blackamoor Washed White*.” The author of this opera, Henry Bate, was a clergyman, who had a living near Chelmsford, in Essex. He produced “*Henry and Emma*,” an interlude, which was acted at

Covent Garden in 1774; and "The Rival Candidates," a comic opera, which came out at Drury Lane, with approbation; but his third piece, in which Mrs. Siddons performed, was coldly received, lived only three nights, and was never printed.

On the 17th of February, 1776, Mrs. Siddons performed in Mrs. Cowley's comedy of "The Runaway," which was acted for seventeen nights consecutively. The "Runaway" is not the best of Mrs. Cowley's comedies; but it is by no means contemptible. Her "Belle's Stratagem" is her *chef d'œuvre*; and I would recommend to those who despise her as a *Della Cruscan* poetess to read that comedy. A recognition of her merits as a comic writer is the more due to her, that they were forgotten by the world in her latter years, when the author of the "Baviad" and "Mæviad" lashed her under her assumed name of Anna Matilda. I must acknowledge, to be sure, that nothing but sheer infatuation can account for the authoress of the "Belle's Stratagem" having obscured a fair reputation by printing carloads of *Della Cruscan* rhymes. As a matter of taste, she deserved admonition: but her sex and her services to literature ought to have screened her from gross vituperation. Gifford abused his power. The public were thankful to him for writing down such nuisances as Williams, the self-styled Anthony Pasquin, an impudent fellow to whom many of the artists and players of London actually paid *black mail* in order to be saved from his acrillity. This was performing a public duty. But he was too savage on the tinsel school; for the feeble *Della Cruscans* would have died without a public execution. Besides, it would have been but justice on the part of Gifford to have blended his censure of Mrs. Cowley's *Della Cruscanism* with a full acknowledgment of her better works.\*

\* I never saw this authoress but once, and that was some thirty years ago, in a bookseller's shop. An old lady came in, who, I was told, was the *Della Cruscan* Anna Matilda. She inquired about the sale of her last poem, "The Siege of Acre." I have since learned that she was at that time in good circumstances, and cherished by many friends; but, either from my fancy picturing the prints of Gifford's satire in her furrowed countenance, or that she was in uncommonly bad spirits, she seemed to me the most forlorn being I had ever seen. When the bookseller told her that he had only sold fifteen copies of her "Siege of Acre," her chagrin was manifest. After she was gone, the bibliopolist informed us that he had actually disposed of only three copies, but could not find in his heart to mortify her with the strict truth. I was told, however, that Mrs. Cowley had written the "Belle's Stratagem." I went home, and read it; and *Letitia Hardy* cured me of my contemptuous compassion for an excellent comic authoress.

At this time, when Mrs. Siddons acted in the "Runaway," Miss Younge was the great magnet in comedy. Yet the part allotted to Mrs. Siddons bespeaks no intention of keeping her back from public attention. On the contrary, while Miss Younge in the piece acted *Bella*, whose fortune is rather in the side-plot, Mrs. Siddons appeared as *Emily*, the lovely fugitive, who may be called the heroine of the play. The part is tender and dignified, and was peculiarly suited to the beauty of Mrs. Siddons. But the comedy, though in some respects pleasant, fails to concentrate much interest in the principal character. In one of the last scenes, the heroine's distress consists in being accused of having been a strolling player, a somewhat mortifying part for our young actress to personate. Mrs. Siddons, according to Mr. Boaden, was to sound the very bass-string of humility, by performing in a farce, by T. Vaughan, called "Love's Metamorphoses;" but Mr. Boaden seems to have condemned the piece without having read it, for he gives it not even its real title, which is "Love's Vagaries," not "Metamorphoses," and it is very passable. The author was clerk of the peace for Westminster. He is canonized in the "Rosciad," by the name of Dapper.

Garrick was now about to leave the stage, and was determined to leave the parting impression of his *comic* excellence by playing his favourite character of *Ranger*, in "The Suspicious Husband." To Mrs. Siddons he allotted the part of *Mrs. Strickland*; and, as far as beauty could give attraction in comedy, no one could better represent the young and lovely wife. On this occasion Mrs. Siddons's type was enlarged on the bills of the play, and she had a whole line to herself—"Mrs. Strickland, Mrs. Siddons." Hitherto she had played no part that was strictly tragic on the London boards, but Garrick now revived "Richard III.", which had been discontinued for several years, and he assigned the part of *Lady Anne* to our actress. She here met Roscius in all his terrors.—Garrick's acting that night must have been startling. From what his contemporaries have said of it, we may guess that his impressiveness bordered upon excess. He made the galleries often laugh when he intended that they should shudder. By his force, approaching to wildness, and the fire of his eyes, he dismayed the young actress. He had directed her, in speaking to him, always to turn her back to the audience, in order that he might keep his own face towards them; and her forgetfulness of this direction was punished by Garrick with a glance of displeasure that unnerved her powers. Of this performance

the following account is given in the theatrical report of "The London Magazine" for May, 1776. After declaring that Garrick's appearance beggared all description, the writer adds: "As to most of the other characters, particularly the female ones, they were wretchedly performed. Mrs. Hopkins was an ungracious *Queen*, Mrs. Johnston a frightful *Duchess*, and Mrs. Siddons a lamentable *Lady Anne*."

A week afterward she had an opportunity to attempt reinstating herself in Garrick's good graces, as "Richard III." was again performed, by command of their majesties, on the 5th of June. Whether she succeeded or not, I know not; but Garrick closed his own brilliant career five days afterward, and left Mrs. Siddons to receive from the managers a dismissal, to which, if he had not prospectively consented, he had at least offered no opposition.

Altogether, though this first failure of the greatest of actresses evinces nothing like positive or acute discernment in the public taste; and though the criticism which I have quoted was most heartlessly uncandid; yet I am not prepared to blame her audiences implicitly for wilful blindness to her merit. By her own confession, she was infirm in her health, and fearfully nervous. It is true she was the identical Mrs. Siddons who, a year afterward, electrified the provincial theatres, and who, in 1782, eclipsed all rivalry whatsoever; but it does not follow that she was *the identical actress*. Her case adds but one to the many instances in the history of great actors and orators, of timidity obscuring the brightest powers at their outset; like chilling vapours awhile retarding the beauty of a day in spring. But the day of her fame, when it rose, well repaid her for the lateness of its rising, and its splendour more than atoned for its morning shade: indeed, it renders her history more interesting by the contrast.\*

\* It is remarkable, that Mrs. Elizabeth Barry, the greatest of Mrs. Siddons's stage predecessors, and Mrs. Oldfield, the most beautiful, were both, like herself, unsuccessful *debutantes*. "The fame," says Colley Cibber, "to which Mrs. Barry arrived is a particular proof of the difficulty there is of judging with certainty, from their first trials, whether young people will ever make any great figure on a theatre. There was, it seems, so little hope of her at her first setting out, that she was, at the end of the first year, discharged the company. I take it for granted, that the objection to Mrs. Barry must have been a defective ear, or some unskillful dissonance in her manner of pronouncing: but where there is a proper voice and person, with the addition of a good understanding, experience tells us that such a defect is not always invincible, of which both Mrs. Barry and the late Mrs. Oldfield are eminent instances. Mrs. Oldfield had been a year in the Theatre Royal before she gave any tolerable

In her Autograph Memoranda, she says that, after her dismissal by letter from the prompter of Drury Lane, she made an engagement at Bath. I imagine she means, that her first important engagement was at Bath, for I find that her first performance after she quitted London was at Birmingham; and there, while she had an engagement for the whole summer season of 1776, she was allowed the highest characters. It was there that she acted with Henderson, who was so struck by her merits, that he wrote immediately to Palmer, the manager of the Bath theatre, urging him in the strongest terms to engage her. The Bath manager could not for the present engage her, but he kept Henderson's advice in his mind.

Early in the year 1777 Mrs. Siddons played at Manchester, and became there so celebrated that her fame brought her an invitation to York. By this time her range of characters was considerable, though it included none of the great females of Shakspeare. She excelled in *Euphrasia* ("The Grecian Daughter"), *Alicia* ("Jane Shore"), *Rosalind* ("As You Like It"), and *Matilda* (in "Douglas"). She was even acceptable as *Lady Townley*. At Manchester, one of her most applauded characters was *Hamlet*, which she performed many years afterward in Dublin, though she could never be prevailed upon to play it in London.

At York, she was engaged from Easter to Whitsuntide, in 1777; and, on the 15th of April, played the *Grecian Daughter*. Tate Wilkinson, who acted with her, as *Evander*, says, in his Memoirs, that though he saw in her every other requisite for great acting, he trembled for fear her wretched health should disable her from sustaining the fatigues of her duty. She had at York at first to encounter some disparagers, among whom, the leading critic of the place, a Mr. Swan, was the most noisy. But she had only performed a few times when all the Yorkists knelt at her shrine, and the swan himself waddled forward to bow his neck in admiration.

"I never remember," says Wilkinson, "any actress to have been so great a favourite at York as Mrs. Siddons was during that short time. All lifted up their eyes with astonishment, that such a voice, such a judgment, and such acting should have been neglected by a London audience, and by the first actor in the world." In the mean time, Henderson's advice had not slept in Palmer's ear, and he invited her to Bath,

hope of her being an actress, so unlike to all manner of propriety was her speaking." How unaccountably then does a genius for the stage make i way towards perfection.

where she consummated the reputation that brought her in triumph to the London boards. "I now made an engagement at Bath," she says, in her Memoranda: "there my talents and industry were encouraged by the greatest indulgence, and, I may say, with some admiration. Tragedies, which had been almost banished, again resumed their proper interest; but still I had the mortification of being obliged to personate many subordinate characters in comedy, the first being, by contract, in the possession of another lady. To this I was obliged to submit, or to forfeit a part of my salary, which was only three pounds a week. Tragedies were now becoming more and more fashionable. This was favourable to my cast of powers; and, while I laboured hard, I began to earn a distinct and flattering reputation. Hard labour indeed it was; for, after the rehearsal at Bath, and on a Monday morning, I had to go and act at Bristol on the evening of the same day; and reaching Bath again, after a drive of twelve miles, I was obliged to represent some fatiguing part there on the Tuesday evening. Meantime, I was gaining private friends as well as public favour; and my industry and perseverance were indefatigable. When I recollect all this labour of mind and body, I wonder that I had strength and courage to support it, interrupted as I was by the cares of a mother, and by the childish sports of my little ones, who were often most unwillingly hushed to silence for interrupting their mother's studies."

During her residence at Bath, July 1, 1779, she gave birth to her second daughter, Maria.

"I remained at Bath," she continues, "about three years, during which time Mr. Henderson came there to act for a few nights. He was most kindly encouraging to me, and, on his return to London, spoke of me most favourably. I acted *Beatrice* with his *Benedick*, and he commended my efforts even in comedy. He was a fine actor, with no great personal advantages indeed; but he was the soul of feeling and intelligence."

Henderson's name has a right to a place in Mrs. Siddons's biography. Within a year after her expulsion from Drury Lane, he pronounced that "*she was an actress who never had had an equal, nor would ever have a superior.*" He was the only great player of his time who did her early justice; and if we had nothing more than this to inscribe on his tomb, it would be no ignoble epitaph.

John Henderson was the son of an Irish factor, in London, and was born in Cheapside, 1746. His father died while he was a child, and left his widowed mother with something less

than 1000*l.*, to support him and two other children. With these slender means she retired to Newport Pagnell, and in that place Henderson, with no other teacher than his mother, passed the first ten years of his life. She taught him to read, she put the English poets into his hands, and was rewarded by hearing him recite them with the instinctive grace of enthusiasm. Shakspeare enraptured his boyish imagination. In his passion for the drama he could not be said to have been stage-struck ; for he longed and pined to see a play of Shakspeare's acted before he had seen an actor or a stage, there being at that time not even strollers at Newport Pagnell.

At eleven years of age he went to a school at Hemel Hempstead, where, within little more than a year, he acquired some knowledge of French, and learned the common rules of arithmetic, besides a little Latin. He owns that he never made a regular study of English grammar. If we were all honest, the confession would not seem singular.

From thence he went to London ; and, having shown an early propensity to drawing, he was placed as a house-pupil with a drawing-master of the name of Fournier. But in that artist's employ he was ill-used, and had few opportunities of studying his art. Nevertheless, during his stay with Fournier, he made a pen-and-ink drawing of a fisherman smoking his pipe, which gained him a premium from the Society for the Encouragement of Art.

Leaving this master, he went to live with a Mr. Cripps, a working silversmith, in St. James's-street ; but the death of this employer left him at twenty years of age upon the world, with few connections, and with no determinate pursuit. In these circumstances he betook himself to his powers of elocution, and gained considerable popularity by public readings in London. Garrick recommended him to Palmer, at Bath, who gave him an engagement at the theatre there ; and he soon became so distinguished as to be called the Bath Roscius. From thence, and to requite him for many mortifying rebuffs from the London managers, he might be said to have come, in despite of them, into the Haymarket and Drury Lane theatres ; and, for several years after Garrick's retirement, he was regarded as the first actor on the English stage. He died in 1785, with a distinguished public and an amiable private reputation.

Mr. Galt, in his "*Lives of the Players*," has made, in my opinion, a harsh and false estimate of his character as an actor. "The elder Colman," says Mr. Galt, "objected to the style in which Henderson sometimes dressed himself, and condemned

his costume in *Shylock* as too shabby.—Foote said of him, that ‘*he would not do* ;’ and Garrick’s contempt of him amounted to personal enmity.—All this,” says Mr. Galt, “serves to confirm the idea that he was not so extraordinary a man as his friends represented.” With a little explanation, however, all this leads to no such conclusion. Colman’s objection to his dress in *Shylock* was never confirmed by public opinion. On the contrary, according to tradition, Henderson was the happiest of all the actors of that part. Boaden observes, with great felicity of expression, that “the power of Henderson, as an actor, was analytic. He was not contented with the mere light of common meaning. He showed it you through a prism, and reflected all the delicate and mingling hues that enter into the composition of any ray of human character. Besides, he had a voice so flexible, that his tones conveyed all that his meaning would insinuate.” This is the testimony of an ear and eye-witness, and it surely outweighs the assertion of Mr. Galt, who never saw him, that “*Henderson was a mere mimic.*” That he had great powers of mimicry is certain; but what great comic actor was ever without them? Garrick himself delighted in imitating the gobbling of a turkey-cock.

Foote said of Henderson, that “*he would not do*.” Yes; but it was before he had seen him on the stage. When he had seen him, he spoke of him as an actor of genius.

Garrick’s contempt of Henderson, according to Galt, approached to personal enmity. But, in the first place, contempt and enmity cannot very well exist together; and, in the next place, Garrick could have no contempt for Henderson, or else he would never have invited him from Bath to London. As to Garrick’s enmity, it arose from Henderson’s refusing his invitation to Drury Lane, and complying with the little manager’s request to take him off before his face. Garrick had chuckled at Henderson’s mimicry of all the other eminent players, and at last entreated to be taken off himself; but he sulked at the imitation, and never forgave it.

Professor Dugald Stewart, who knew Henderson, told me that his power of memory was the most astonishing he had ever met with. In the philosopher’s presence he took up a newspaper, and, after reading it once, repeated such a portion of it as, to Mr. Stewart, seemed utterly marvellous. When he expressed his surprise, Henderson modestly replied, “If you had been obliged, like me, to depend, during many years, for your daily bread, on getting words by heart, you would not be so much astonished at habit having produced this facility.”

"In the summer of 1782," Mrs. Siddons thus continues her Memoranda, "I received an invitation to revisit Drury Lane. After my former dismissal from thence, it may be imagined that this was to me a triumphant moment. My good reception in London I cannot but partly attribute to the enthusiastic accounts of me which the amiable Duchess of Devonshire had brought thither, and spread before my arrival. I had the honour of her acquaintance during her visit at Bath, and her unqualified approbation of my performances."

Mrs. Siddons says she was truly touched at the thought of parting from her kind friends at Bath. She took leave of them in the following lines of her own composition.

#### MRS. SIDDONS'S ADDRESS ON QUITTING THE BATH THEATRE.

HAVE I not raised some expectation here?—  
Wrote by herself?—What! authoress and player?—  
True, we have heard her,—thus I guess'd you'd say,—  
With decency recite another's lay;  
But never heard, nor ever could we dream  
Herself had sipp'd the Heliconian stream.  
Perhaps you farther said,—excuse me, pray,  
For thus supposing all that you might say,—  
What will she treat of in this same address?  
Is it to show her learning?—Can you guess?  
Here let me answer—No: far different views  
Possess'd my soul, and fired my virgin Muse;  
'Twas honest gratitude, at whose request  
Shamed be the heart that will not do its best.  
The time draws nigh when I must bid adieu  
To this delightful spot—nay, ev'n to you—  
To you, whose fost'ring kindness rear'd my name,  
O'erlooked my faults, but magnified my fame.  
How shall I bear the parting? Well I know  
Anticipation here is daily wo.  
Oh! could kind Fortune, where I next am thrown,  
Bestow but half the candour you have shown.  
Envy, o'ercome, will hurl her pointless dart,  
And critic gall be shed without its smart;  
The numerous doubts and fears I entertain,  
Be idle all—as all possess'd in vain.—  
But to my promise. If I thus am bless'd,  
In friendship link'd, beyond my worth caress'd,—  
Why don't I here, you'll say, content remain,  
Nor seek uncertainties for certain gain?  
What can compensate for the risks you run,  
And what your reasons?—Surely you have none.  
To argue here would but your time abuse:  
I keep my word—my reason I produce—

[*Here three children were discovered: they were HENRY, SALLY, and MARIA SIDDONS.*]

These are the moles that bear me from your side,  
 Where I was rooted—where I could have died.  
 Stand forth, ye elves, and plead your mother's cause :  
 Ye little magnets, whose soft influence draws  
 Me from a point where every gentle breeze  
 Wafted my bark to happiness and ease—  
 Sends me adventurous on a larger main,  
 In hopes that you may profit by my gain.  
 Have I been hasty ?—am I then to blame ?  
 Answer, all ye who own a parent's name.  
 Thus have I tired you with an untaught Muse,  
 Who for your favour still most humbly sues,  
 That you, for classic learning, will receive  
 My soul's best wishes, which I freely give—  
 For polished periods round, and touched with art,—  
 The fervent offering of my grateful heart.

Mrs. Siddons returned to Drury Lane theatre in 1782, and may be said to have mounted with but a few steps to unrivalled possession of the tragic throne. The oldest praisers of the by-gone time scarcely pretended to have beheld or heard of her superior in acting, though they had seen the best actresses of the century, and had heard their fathers describe those of the age before.

When I entered on the Life of Mrs. Siddons, I felt curious to ascertain the traditional characters of those women who may be called her predecessors as the queens of our tragic stage ; and, when any subject engages our own interest, we naturally imagine that it will not be wholly unattractive to the curiosity of others. I even felt as if there would be something like abruptness in commencing the history of her professional supremacy without some prefatory remarks on the previous state of female acting in England. This was, perhaps, taking an exaggerated view of the subject. But, at all events, as my retrospect of our greatest tragic actresses, anterior to Mrs. Siddons, will be brief, I hope the reader will not repudiate it as a wholly uninteresting digression.

It is true, that all the information to be gleaned respecting those elder actresses is very scanty ; and it is the misfortune of histrionic genius that the most vivid portraits of it convey but vague conceptions of its excellence. And yet, amid all this vagueness, the mind can make out some general and trustworthy conclusions. I find, for instance, no queen of our stage so unequivocally extolled for majesty and beauty of person as Mrs. Siddons ; nor any one whose sway over her audiences can be imagined to have been stronger. My inference is, if I may parody Milton's phrase, that she was the

fairest of her predecessors—and that if Time could rebuild his ruins, and react the lost scenes of existence, he would present no female to match her on the tragic stage.

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### CHAPTER III.

First Introduction of Females on the English Stage—Names and Characters of Mrs. Siddons's greatest Predecessors—Mrs. Betterton—Mrs. Anne Marshall—Mrs. Boutell—Mrs. Barry—Mrs. Bracegirdle—Mrs. Oldfield—Mrs. Porter—Mrs. Cibber—Mrs. Pritchard—Mrs. Yates—Mrs. Crawford.

UNTIL the time of Charles the Second, there were no women actors in our theatres. Female characters were performed by boys, or young men. Even after the Restoration, *this custom* was not all at once discontinued; and we hear of Kynaston, the last beautiful youth who figured in petticoats on the stage, having been carried about in his theatrical dress by ladies of fashion in their carriages. This was an unseemly spectacle, and we can forgive the Puritans for objecting to see "*men in women's clothing.*" But against this impropriety, the Puritans ought to have appealed to common sense and decency, instead of quoting a text from the Book of Deuteronomy, which forbids the appearance of men in female attire: for, though it is true that the Jewish law has interdicted the assumption of women's dress by men, yet it should be remembered that the Levitical law is not binding upon Christians.

The restorers of our theatres, without troubling themselves about the Puritans, followed the custom of the Continent, in bringing women upon the stage, putting a stop to the impersonation of queens and heroines by he-creatures, who had sometimes to be shaved before they acted. Yet this admission of women among the players, though a great natural improvement, occurred in times and circumstances that made it appear at first rather an unfavourable change for the moral character of the stage. Since the death of Shakspeare, and during the latter part of James's reign, the drama had grown more and more licentious. The speeches which stage-heroines had to hear and utter were so gross, that the Puritans pronounced it impossible for any woman who was not a courtesan to tread the boards; and Charles the Second, who had re-opened the theatres, and

was effectively the manager of one of them, seemed as if he strove for a wager to make good the words of the Puritans. Considering the profligacy of the age, it is more wonderful that a few actresses, and these the best, were unexceptionable private characters, than that the stage gave its contingent to Charles's seraglio.\*

Though, even in those times, the lives of Mrs. Betterton and other actresses belied the puritanic assertion that no modest woman could tread the boards, still modern civilization has robbed the Puritans of the strongest objection which they could allege against the theatre, namely, the grossness of its language ; so that the most delicate female need not now shrink from the profession on that account. At present, after

\*Among Charles's mistresses, his "Loves of the Theatre" were the least expensive and unpopular. Nell Gwynne, it is true, had 1500*l.* a year ; but the Duchess of Cleveland had 4700*l.* : the Duchess of Portsmouth had still more. The latter were hated by the whole nation ; while Nelly, who was called the "Poor Man's Friend," was literally a general favourite, and not undeservedly ; for, bred as she had been, as an orange-girl, amid the haunts of dissipation, vice was more her destiny than her blame. She was really a good-hearted woman, and, in the days of her prosperity, showed herself grateful to her old friends ; among whom she had the honour of ranking Otway and Dryden. She was faithful to the king, never pestered him about politics, and was never the creature of ministers. Once, when Charles had ordered an extravagant service of plate, as a present to the Duchess of Portsmouth, from a jeweller in Cheapside, an immense crowd collected about the shop, cursing the duchess, and wishing that the plate were melted and poured down her throat. But they added, "What a pity it should not be bestowed on Madam Ellen!"

Nell was often successful in throwing ridicule on her rival the Duchess of Portsmouth, originally Mlle. Querouaille. She pretended to be related to the best families of France ; and, whenever one of their members died, she put herself into mourning. It happened that news of the Cham of Tartary's death had lately reached England. A prince of France was also recently dead, and the Duchess of Portsmouth was, of course, in sables. Nell came to court in the same attire, and, standing close by her grace, was asked by one of her friends why she was in mourning ? "Oh!" said Nell, "have you not heard of my loss, in the death of the Cham of Tartary?"—"And what the deuse," replied her friend, "was the Cham of Tartary to you?"—"Oh," answered Nell, "exactly the same relation that the Prince of —— was to Mlle. Querouaille."

The mistaken tradition of Ellen Gwynne having founded Chelsea Hospital probably arose from her character for benevolence, as well as from her frequently visiting Chelsea, where her mother lived many years, and where the old woman died, in consequence of falling one day into the Thames, when looking out of her window. What had made her top-heavy is not recorded.

so many women, who have been patterns of their sex, have been actresses, it may be safely affirmed, that a young *débutante*, ambitious of first-rate rank as an actress, would find the greatest talents scarcely available without personal respectability of character. Still there are persons, not puritanical, who think it derogatory to female delicacy to meet the gaze of spectators in impassioned parts. This objection, I grant, may apply to private theatricals. The unprofessional actress, who makes and returns love-speeches before an audience, is likely to have no better motive than her vanity. But the public actress has a fair apology, and her professional publicity is an additional challenge to her virtuous pride.

We sometimes hear the player's vocation pronounced degrading, because it exposes him to public insults; but this is certainly a most unfair argument, at least when it comes from those who frequent the theatre. By attending such entertainments, they recognise the player as a dispenser of innocent amusement; and when they insult him, merely because he fails to please, they are, no doubt, obliging the actor to ply a degrading vocation; but if cruelty and injustice be disgraceful, they are also degrading themselves. Either it should be proved that the stage is noxious to society, and that it should therefore be abolished, or, if it be tolerated, the player's occupation should be made as respectable as possible by good treatment. Even if it were admitted, for the sake of argument, that there is something in the actor's life (that something I leave to others to ascertain) which necessarily tends to impress faults on his moral character, still, what profession can be named which, if it finds any weaknesses in the nature of a man, will not tend to increase them and bring them out? All professions tend, more or less, to stamp us with something peculiar, and not always with amiable peculiarities. Yet society wisely honours several professions for their general usefulness, though they labour under this objection. To give but one instance: The world very properly holds the barrister's calling in high respect; for we know that life and property would be less secure than they now are, if every man were to be his own lawyer. And yet it is notorious, that the lawyer's life, which makes him daily and hourly a hireling either on the right side or the wrong side of a cause, as his brief may chance to call him, must tend to imbue his mind with a taste for sophistry, as well as with adroitness in the practice of it. In fact, there is a great deal of acting, both in courts of justice and elsewhere, that goes by a different name.

If I should appear all this time to be begging the question, and to be assuming that theatrical amusements are *de facto* indispensable to society, I would only ask of those who object to them, to say if, practically speaking, they could be done away with? Would the public permit you to shut up the theatres? No; no more (I speak it respectfully) than to shut up the churches. The love of the drama is a public instinct, that requires to be regulated, but is too deep for eradication. I am no such bigot for the stage as to say that it is necessarily a school of morals; for, by bad management, it may be made the reverse: and I think, on the whole, that the drama rather follows than leads public morals. At the same time it has a general indirect tendency towards the good of society, which, if the theatre be kept amenable to decency and public opinion, may make the drama directly promotive of good morals. It contributes to cheerfulness, and it draws men from grosser enjoyments. It may be made an innocent, nay, an instructive amusement. As a tasteful recreation, it sweetens the public temper. It has well been compared to a mirror, in which we may see ourselves as others see us. But, granting the similitude to be just, the enemy of the theatre will possibly ask me, Has the mirror, at which we dress ourselves, the power of giving symmetry to our features, or of adding an inch to our stature? No; but still that chamber-mirror will show a man how ugly he looks with an unwashed face, or an angry physiognomy. In like manner, the moral mirror of the drama will show us what passions most become us and most deform us, and may therefore, certainly, instruct us in the regulation of our moral feelings.

To say that the stage is liable to abuse, is to say nothing more than is applicable to every other source of human pleasure. You cannot excite men joyously without some contingent dangers. The playhouse, say its enemies, is the resort of great numbers of the vicious, the idle, and the dissipated. Unhappily, so are all popular assemblies, not excepting every Methodist meeting in the kingdom. In fact, if you proscribe theatres, you are bound, in consistency, to persecute Methodism, to uproot vineyards, to destroy breweries, and to abolish music and dancing.

And religion says as little as sound morality against plays and players. The Scriptures nowhere stigmatize them, though, in our Saviour's time, there was a theatre in Jerusalem. That theatrical establishment, we know, was forced upon the Jews, at the expense of several lives, by Herod the Great;

and, after his death, if Jesus Christ had thought a theatre among the evils to be extirpated by Christianity, he would have found no topic more popular than an innovation so violent to Jewish feelings. But he has left upon it not the slightest denunciation ; and, in this circumstance, he is imitated by all the Apostles : St. Paul even quotes a dramatic poet, and shows that he was well acquainted with the Attic drama.

It is not positively certain, but it is extremely probable, that the earliest regular actress of the English stage was a Mrs. Saunderson, afterward Mrs. Betterton, the wife of the famous actor. At all events, if not the earliest, she was the greatest actress for many years after the Restoration. Both her husband's theatrical character and her own have been painted by Cibber in memorable colours. "Betterton," he says, "was an actor, as Shakspeare was an author, both without competitors, formed for the mutual assistance and illustration of each other's genius. How Shakspeare wrote, all men who have a taste for nature may read and know ; but with higher rapture still would Shakspeare be read, could they conceive how Betterton played him. Pity it is, that the momentary beauties flowing from an harmonious elocution cannot, like those of poetry, be their own record ; that the animated graces of the player can live no longer than the instant breath and motion that represent them ; or, at least, can but faintly glimmer through the memory and imperfect attestation of a few surviving spectators."

Mrs.,\* or, as we should now call her, Miss Saunderson, married Mr. Betterton in 1663. Cibber speaks of her in 1690, when she was already a veteran on the stage : but he says that, "though far advanced in years, she was still so great an actress that even the famous Mrs. Barry, who acted *Lady Macbeth* after her, could not in that part, with all her superior strength and melody of voice, throw out those quick and careless strokes of terror which the other gave, with a facility in her manner that rendered her at once tremendous and delightful. Time could not impair her skill, though it gave her person to decay. She was, to the last, the admiration of all true judges of nature and lovers of Shakspeare, in whose plays she chiefly excelled, and without a rival. She was the faithful companion of her husband and his fellow-labourers for five-and-forty years, and was a woman of unblemished and sober life. She had the honour to teach Queen Anne, when princess, the

\* Unmarried ladies at that time got the title of Mrs.

part of *Semandra*, in 'Mithridates,' which she acted at court in King Charles's time." After her husband's death, which happened in 1710, the queen gave her a pension. Betterton's death so much affected her that she lost her senses for some time, but recovered them, and survived him for two years.\*

While Mr. and Mrs. Betterton were the ornaments of that one of the two great theatres which was called the Duke's, Mrs. Anne Marshall was for many years the principal actress in the King's Company. She is said to have excelled in parts of dignity. Davies tells us, in his Dramatic Miscellanies, that the high sentiments of honour, in many of her characters, corresponded with the dictates of her mind, and were justified by her private conduct. But Davies got this information from a book of no authority, written by Gildon, and published by Curl, two names that may well make the hair of our literary faith stand on end. We might accept their testimony, perhaps, on the mere ground of its being favourable to Mrs. Marshall, as we may safely take our oaths that neither Curl nor Gildon ever uttered, in the whole course of their lives, a single falsehood in behalf of any human character except their own. And Mrs. Marshall may have been an excellent woman for aught that appears to the contrary; but, in truth, very little is known about her: for, in the long story of her resisting Lord Oxford's dishonourable addresses, but being at last basely beguiled into a mock marriage, in which his lordship's coachman was dressed up as a clergyman, Curl has related what happened to a different actress.

That Mrs. Marshall was capable, like Mrs. Betterton, of sustaining the high characters of Shakspeare, is not at least evinced by the list of her parts; for in that list I find her performing only one Shakspearian character, namely, *Calphurnia*, in "Julius Cæsar." Something like a lingering taste for the great dramatist seems to have been kept alive at the Duke's Theatre by the genius of the Bettertons; though, ultimately, they were obliged to appear in plays of Shakspeare basely altered. But at the King's Theatre Shakspeare was fairly

\* Among the characters of Shakspeare which she performed were *Ophelia*, *Juliet*, *Queen Katharine*, and *Lady Macbeth*. For a full list of the parts played by this actress, and by all the other predecessors of Mrs. Siddons whom I have mentioned, I refer the reader, if he is curious on the subject, to Mr. Genest's "Account of the Stage," published in 1833.

† Curl was so formidable for getting up lives of people, when they were hardly cold in their coffin, that Dr. Arbuthnot denominated him "one of the new terrors of Death."

obsolete. Indeed, in that iron age, Ben Jonson himself was not more popular than Crowne, while, for one play of Shakespeare's, probably five of Beaumont and Fletcher's, and seven of Dryden's, were performed.

The sweet-featured Mrs. Boutell was a highly popular actress in that period, from 1663 to 1696. Her forte was simplicity and tenderness, and she was particularly admired in *Aspasia*, in the "Maid's Tragedy." Though Cibber makes no mention of her, the parts which she played denoted her consequence on the stage. She was the original *Statira* of Lee's "Alexander," and acted the Rival Queens successively with Mrs. Marshall and Mrs. Barry. Once, when playing with the latter of these ladies, she was in danger of dying on the stage in earnest. Before the curtain drew up, the two queens, *Statira*, Boutell, and *Roxana*, Barry, had a real rivalry about a lace veil, which was at last awarded to the former by the property-man. This decision so enraged *Roxana*, that she acted her part rather too naturally, and, in stabbing *Statira*, sent her dagger, though it was a blunted one, through Mrs. Boutell's stays, about a quarter of an inch into the flesh. Mrs. Elizabeth Barry, however, though a virago, was the best actress of her age, for she eclipsed both Mrs. Marshall and Mrs. Boutell; and Cibber tells us that, in 1696, he found her in possession of all the chief tragic parts.

She was the daughter of Edward Barry, a barrister, who got the title of colonel for having raised a regiment in the cause of Charles I. But as he ruined himself by providing soldiers for Charles, his family were left at his death to provide for themselves. His orphan daughter was born in 1658. She was educated by the charity of Lady Davenant, a relation of the poet of that name, and by his interest was brought upon the boards in 1673. Her first effort was a failure. With a good voice, she was thought to be utterly defective in ear; and the Duke's company pronounced her incapable of ever becoming an actress. It must be allowed that they were precipitate in their judgment, for the young *débutante* was then only fifteen years of age. Two years afterward, she reappeared in Otway's "Alcibiades," when her merit obtained the thanks of the poet, and drew universal attention. In 1680 the part of *Monimia*, in the first representation of the "Orphan," drew forth her powers to still higher advantage; and, two years afterward, her *Belvidera*, in "Venice Preserved," ob-

tained for her the permanent appellation of *the famous Madam Barry*. Her fame was not diminished by her appearing as the original *Isabella*, in Southerne's "Fatal Marriage;" and she enjoyed perhaps a higher character than any actress anterior to Mrs. Siddons.

I am sorry to add, however, that it was professional, not private character. She was the mistress of Lord Rochester; and we are told that she owed her improvement in acting chiefly to his instructions. The latter circumstance I am inclined to consider apocryphal, for two reasons: in the first place, because the minute account of her tuition by Rochester which Davies gives, in his Dramatic Miscellanies, was derived solely from a book of bad authority published by Curi; and, in the next place, because, putting disgust out of the question, I have some difficulty in imagining the actress of *Marimia* or *Belvidera* drawing lessons of refined enchantment from a gentleman so habitually drunk, and so grossly profligate, as Lord Rochester. I admit that some letters of the peer to Mrs. Barry, published by Touson in 1716, if they be genuine, are, considering the nature of the connexion, not discreditable to him; and farther, that his name has become a by-word of infamy to a greater degree than it really merits. Innumerable verses of a vile nature have been fathered upon Lord Rochester which he never wrote. I believe him indeed to have been more intelligent and accomplished than the odium attached to his vices generally allows us to suppose. But, after all, he was a gross being, in spite of his best poems and the history of his penitence; and he illustrates the truth, that if men's vices do not degrade them more than crimes, they at least throw a heavier cloud over their genius. I cannot figure to myself Mrs. Barry inhabiting graces from his suggestions.

I have quoted Cibber's testimony, that in 1696 he found Mrs. Barry in possession of all the chief parts of tragedy. Cibber adds, "With what skill she gave life to them you will judge from the words of Dryden, in his preface to 'Cleomenes,' where he says, 'Mrs. Barry, always excellent, has in this tragedy excelled herself, and gained a reputation beyond any woman I have ever seen on a theatre.' I very well remember," continues Cibber, "her acting that part; and, however unnecessary it may seem to give my judgment after Dryden's, I cannot help saying, I do not only close with his opinion, but will venture to add, that, though Dryden has been dead these thirty-eight years, the same compliment to this hour may be due to her excellence.

And though she was then\* not a little past her youth, she was not till that time fully arrived at the maturity of her power and judgment: from whence I would observe, that the short life of beauty is not long enough to form a complete actress. In men, the delicacy of person is not so absolutely necessary, nor the decline of it so soon taken notice of.

“Mrs. Barry, in characters of greatness, had a presence of elevated dignity: her mien and motion, superb and gracefully majestic; her voice, full, clear, and strong, so that no violence of passion could be too much for her; and, when distress or tenderness possessed her, she subsided into the most affecting melody and softness. In the art of exciting pity she had a power beyond all the actresses I have yet seen, or what your imagination can conceive. Of the former of these two great excellences she gave delightful proofs in almost all the heroic plays of Dryden and Lee; and of the latter in the softer passions of Otway’s *Monimia* and *Belvidera*. In scenes of anger, defiance, or resentment, while she was impetuous and terrible, she poured out the sentiment with an enchanting harmony; and it was this particular excellence for which Dryden made her the above-recited compliment, upon her acting *Cassandra*, in his ‘Cleomenes.’ But here I am apt to think his partiality for that character may have tempted his judgment to let it pass for her masterpiece, when he could not but know that there were several other characters in which her action might have given her a fairer pretence to the praise he has bestowed on her for *Cassandra*; for in no part of that is there the least ground for compassion as in *Monimia*, nor equal cause for admiration as in the nobler love of *Cleopatra*, or the tempestuous jealousy of *Roxana*. It was in these lights I thought Mrs. Barry shone with a much brighter excellence than in *Cassandra*.”

Yet Anthony Aston,† in his Supplement to Cibber’s Works,

\* By the word *then*, Cibber means the later time at which he himself saw her, and not the time alluded to by Dryden, when Mrs. Barry was still very young.

† Anthony Aston wrote a theatrical pamphlet, entitled “A brief Supplement to Colley Cibber’s Lives of the famous Actors and Actresses.” He lived early enough to have seen Mrs. Barry, having been a performer in the reign of King William. Chetwood says, he played in all the theatres in London, but never continued long in any. His way of living was peculiar to himself; he used to resort to the principal cities and towns in England with his Medley, as he called it, which consisted of some capital scenes of humour out of the most celebrated plays. Chetwood adds, that he was as well known in every town as the post-horse that carried the mail.

tells us that, "with all her enchantment, this fine creature was not handsome; her mouth opening most on the right side, which she strove to draw the other way; and, at times, composing her face as if to have her picture drawn. She was middle-sized," he adds, "had darkish hair, light eyes, and was indifferent plump. She had a manner of drawing out her words, which suited her, but not Mrs. Bradshaw and Mrs. Porter, her successors. In tragedy, she was solemn and august; in comedy, alert, easy, and genteel,—pleasant in her face and manner, and filling the stage with a variety of action. Yet she could not sing, nor dance; no, not even in a country-dance."

Mrs. Barry appeared above a hundred times as the original heroine of some new comic or tragic drama, which is more, I believe, than can be said of any actress that ever trod the British stage. She died of hydrophobia, from the bite of her own lap-dog, at the age of fifty-five, and was buried in the churchyard of Acton, where her monument still remains.

When Mrs. Cibber was at the zenith of her popularity, Cibber tells us that Mrs. Anne Bracegirdle was just blooming towards maturity. He luxuriates in describing her fascination of her audiences, which was such that it was the fashion among the gay and young to have a *taste* or *tendre* for Mrs. Bracegirdle. From the important characters that were intrusted to her in tragedy, such as *Almeira* in the "Mourning Bride," *Isabella* in "Measure for Measure," *Cordelia*, *Portia*, and *Ophelia*, it is presumed that she was a good tragic actress: but Cibber does not say so; and her chief charm appears to have lain in the lighter drama.

Her name, however, was connected with too deep a tragedy in real life. A Captain Hill, whose offers of marriage she had refused, made an attempt at her abduction; and, having been foiled, he, on the same evening, stabbed her friend and fellow-actor Mountford, of whom he was jealous, in the neighbourhood of her dwelling. The ruffian Hill escaped the gallows by flight. Lord Mohun, who figures twice in the State Trials, was indicted as his accomplice in the murder, but was acquitted.

Mrs. Bracegirdle lived to a great age, and, it would seem, with fair reputation, in spite of the surmise that Mountford died the victim of an illicit attachment to her. Both Cibber and A. Aston speak of her in terms of the highest respect. But I am sorry to have seen in our own day, in Mr. Bellchambers's edition of Cibber's *Apology*, an attack upon her memory,

is my opinion as unfair as it is furious ; raking up the very scandal which the more respectable part of her contemporaries appear to have disbelieved. Perhaps I may be asked, of what consequence *now* is Mrs. Bracegirdle's character ? Very true : as a matter taken entirely by itself, it is of no consequence whether she was a wanton or a vestal ; but it is of importance that even deceased human character should not be taken away on forced suspicions or on feeble proofs ; for injustice towards the dead leads, by no very circuitous route, to injustice towards the living. Once convict the one on false or defective evidence, and you will soon leave the other at the mercy of malignity. The serpent vituperation will thus grow into an amphisbæna, to sting at both ends.\*

\* At the passage where Cibber says of Mrs. Bracegirdle that she was not unguarded in her private conduct, his annotator catches at the words, and says, "She was decidedly not unguarded in her conduct, for, though the object of general suspicion, no proof of positive unchastity was ever brought against her ; but her intrigue with Mountford is hardly to be disputed, and there is pretty ample evidence that Congreve was honoured with the gratification of his love." Here is a fine juxtaposition of admission and assertion : no proof of positive unchastity, and yet pretty ample evidence of Congreve's success ! But where did Mr. Bellchambers find that she was the object of general suspicion ? Not in the testimony of her contemporaries Aston and Cibber, but in the lampooner Tom Brown, and in a collection of poems which, by Mr. Bellchambers's own showing, is the most infamous that was ever published.

Of her intrigue with Mountford there is no evidence at all. Hill, whom she had refused in marriage, used to talk jealously over his cups about Mountford, and threaten to kill him. But are the ravings of a drunken murderer, and a man capable of attempting a rape and abduction, to pass for evidence ? Mountford, however, was killed near her dwelling, before which Lord Mohun and Hill, on the night of the failure of their noble enterprise, when the crowd rescued Mrs. Bracegirdle, after she had been knocked down by the russians, were parading with drawn swords ; and Mr. Bellchambers's inference is, that Mountford could by no possibility have come thither but for an improper purpose. Now Mrs. Bracegirdle's house was in Arundel-street, in the Strand, and Mountford, who was a married man, had to cross the top of that street on the way to his own home. He came down Arundel-street instead of crossing the top of it, and was struck, challenged, and slain by Hill. But is the circumstance of his having come out of his way such damning proof of his connexion with Mrs. Bracegirdle ? He was ignorant of the late attempt at her abduction ; but, when he came to the top of Arundel-street, if there was either starlight or moonlight, or the glimmer of a lamp, he must have seen that there was something extraordinary going on before Mrs. Bracegirdle's door, where Hill and Mohun, refreshed with wine from the neighbouring vintner's, were pleading for entrance, and alarming the neighbourhood. And that the night was not dark is proved by the evidence on Lord Mohun's trial. Mountford must, therefore, not only have heard, but seen the disturbance in a short street ; and with the most innocent

Mrs. Bracegirdle left the stage in consequence of the ascendant popularity of Mrs. Oldfield.

I imagine Anne Oldfield, though the descriptions of her give us no idea of such majesty as Mrs. Siddons, to have been otherwise the most beautiful woman that ever trod the British stage. Even indifferent prints of her give us a conception of those large speaking eyes, which she half shut with so much archness in comedy, and of the graceful features and spirited mien that could put life in tragedy, even into Thomson's "Sophonisba." "She was tallish in stature," says Cibber, "beautiful in action and aspect, and she always looked like one of those principal figures in the finest paintings, that first seize and longest delight the eye of the spectator. Her countenance was benevolent, like her heart,\* yet it could express contemptuous dignity so well, that once, when a malignant beau rose in the pit to hiss her, she made him instantly hide his head and vanish, by a pausing look, and her utterance of the words 'Poor creature.' " Her voice, according to Cibber, was sweet, strong, and melodious, and her elocution voluble, distinct, and judicious. But I must take an abrupt leave of this fair being, with a confession, that neither she nor Mrs. Bracegirdle can,

motives he might have gone down that street, instead of crossing the top of it. Mr. Bellchambers, in this business, seems almost to have a kindly feeling for the ruffian Hill; and he praises Lord Mohun for his chivalrous devotion to his friend, the murderer and would-be ravisher. In his opinion, "the player Mountford fell a victim, not unfairly, to one of those casual encounters which mark the general violence of the times." Abominable!

\* For many years, indeed as long as she lived, she gave an annuity of 50. a year to the poet Savage, that he might pursue his poetry and his studies undistressed. After her death, the benevolence of the whole British public was canvassed for the same sum, but without success. Latterly, while she was allowing Savage this pension, she was still plying her profession, under the painful illness that preceded her death, and when her cheeks were often bathed with tears from corporeal pain, while she was playing her most smiling parts.

Pope attacked her, dead and alive, four times, in his poetry. He hated her merely for being the friend of Cibber, who had ridiculed the obscene and stupid farce of "Five Hours after Marriage," which Pope was concerned in getting up. In chapter xii. of "The Art of Sinking in Poetry," he accuses her of prurient conversation, but his own indecency disarms his scandal, for he utters it in sentences unfit to be quoted, and which he was himself ashamed to reprint. The damnation of the "Five Hours" gave Pope an implacable aversion to players. He says, "The players and I are luckily no friends;" but he might have omitted the word "luckily," for his enmity to players, as to other people, kept him in the foul atmosphere of satire, when he should have been breathing the empyreal of poetry.

in strictness, be ranked among the great tragic predecessors of Mrs. Siddons. Perhaps, if Anne Oldfield had not delighted in her comic supremacy, she had beauty, feeling, and intellect enough to have been a finished tragedian. But, though Chetwood attests her popularity in many characters of tragedy, still she seems to have been forced into its service against her inclination, by her looks, voice, and elocution. When offered a tragic part, she used to say, "Oh, give it to Mrs. Porter; she can make a far better tragedy face than I can."

Mrs. Porter was the genuine tragic successor of the famous Barry,\* whose female attendant she had been. She was noticed, when a child, by the great Betterton, who saw her in a lord-mayor's pageant in the reign of James II. In those times it was customary for the fruit-women of the theatres to stand fronting the pit, with their backs to the stage; and this actress was so little when she came under Betterton's tuition, that he used to threaten, if she would not speak and act as he would have her, that he would put her into a fruit-woman's basket, and cover her with a vine-leaf. Bred under Betterton, she lived to see Garrick, and was so charmed by his acting that she lamented her age and want of power to tread the stage with him.

Mrs. Porter was tall, fair, well-shaped, and easy and dignified in action. But she was not handsome, and her voice had a small degree of tremor. Moreover, she imitated, or rather faultily exceeded, Mrs. Barry in the habit of prolonging and toning her pronunciation, sometimes to a degree verging upon a chant. But whether it was that the public ear was at that period accustomed to a demi-chant, or that she threw off the defect in the heat of passion, it is certain that her general judgment and genius, in the highest bursts of tragedy, inspired enthusiasm in all around her; and that she was thought to be alike mistress of the terrible and the tender. Dr. Johnson said, that in the vehemence of tragic acting he had never seen her equal; and the great actor Booth spoke in raptures of her *Belvidera*. By her powers and popularity, she kept several new-born and weakly tragedies from dying a natural death; an act of charity, however, that is, like many others, of doubtful benefit to the public.

Her history inspires regret. With a character not only un-

\* It will hardly be necessary to caution any reader against confusing the elder and famous Madam Barry with the wife of Spranger Barry, afterward Mrs. Crawford.

questioned, but marked by the noblest traits of generosity, she had to ply her profession for many years on the stage when she was absolutely a cripple. The cause of her lameness deserves honourable mention. On a summer evening, when she was taking the air in a one-horse chaise, having with her, according to custom, a brace of pistols to defend her against robbery, a highwayman came up and demanded her money : she levelled one of her pistols at him ; the assailant immediately changed his tone to supplication, told her his name and the abode of his starving family, and appealed to her compassion so strongly that she gave him ten guineas out of her purse. He left her, and she lashed her horse to go on, but the animal started out of his track, upset the chaise, and caused her by her fall to dislocate her hip-joint. Notwithstanding all the pain and loss which the man had thus occasioned to her, she inquired into his circumstances, and finding that he had told her the truth, she raised sixty pounds among her acquaintance and sent it to the relief of his family. She was so much injured by this accident, that in acting *Elizabeth*, in the "Albion Queens," she had to support herself on a crutched cane ; but she turned even that circumstance to advantage ; for after signing *Mary's* death-warrant, she expressed her agitation by striking the stage with her cane so violently as to draw bursts of applause.

When she could act no longer, in consequence of her lameness, she had to subsist upon charity. Dr. Johnson paid her a visit some years before her death. She was then so wrinkled, that he said a picture of old age, in the abstract, might have been taken from her countenance.

Among her principal characters were the *Duchess of Malfy* ; the *Queen*, in "Hamlet;" *Aspasia*, in the "Maid's Tragedy;" *Portia*, in "Julius Cæsar;" *Monimia, Belvidera* ; *Isabella*, in the "Fatal Marriage;" *Zara*, in the "Mourning Bride;" *Volumnia, Desdemona*, and *Queen Katharine*. She scarcely appeared on the stage after 1738.

Mrs. Cibber, having been formerly a singer, came out as an actress in 1736. Her maiden name was Arne ; she was the sister of the famous musician of that name. Dr. Burney, in his "History of Music," says that she captivated every hearer by the sweetness and expression of her voice in singing. Unfortunately for herself, she married Theophilus, the worthless son of Colley Cibber. She made her first appearance at Drury Lane with great *éclat*, in Hill's tragedy of "Zara," but was soon afterward obliged to retire for a while, in consequence

of a public trial, that exposed a lapse in her conjugal duty, if duty she could be said to have owed to such a wretch as Theophilus Cibber. It was clearly proved that he had connived at, or rather plotted, her seduction. He laid his damages at 5000*l.* : the jury awarded him ten pounds. Davies praises the symmetry of her form, the expressiveness of her features, and her preservation of the appearance of youth till long after she had attained to middle life. He says that the harmony of her voice was as powerful as the animation of her look ; that in grief and tenderness her eyes looked as if they swam in tears, and in rage and despair seemed to dart flashes of fire ; and that, in spite of the unimportance of her figure, she maintained a dignity in her action and a grace in her step. She was so like Garrick that she might have passed for his sister. This is observable, I think, even in the wretched portrait of her in Mathews's collection, though that portrait makes her any thing but a beauty. But her countenance must have been full fraught with expression. Tate Wilkinson, one of the most extraordinary mimics that ever lived, could imitate all the best actors and actresses of his time ; but the electrifying manner of Mrs. Cibber was beyond his reach, and he owns that he could only retain her in his mind's eye. He says that her features, figure, and singing made her the best *Ophelia* that ever appeared either before or since. Craddock tells us that she was identified with *Ophelia*. Davies speaks with rapture of her *Cordelia* ; and John Taylor told me that she strongly resembled Mrs. Siddons in the indescribable power of her eyes. Finally, when Garrick heard of her death, he exclaimed, "Then Tragedy is dead on one side !" meaning female actors. On the other hand, there are two testimonies not wholly to be rejected, which, I think, may justify some suspicion that her elocution had a chant which would not have suited our modern ears, though, in those of her contemporaries it seemed to harmonize, heaven knows how, with Garrick's acting !

Cumberland, in his Memoirs, tells us that, "as *Calista*, Mrs. Cibber sang, or at least recitatively, Rowe's harmonious strain in a key high pitched yet sweet withal, something in the manner of the *Improvisatore*. It was so extremely wanting in contrast, that though it did not wound the ear, it wearied it."

Miss Seward says, in one of her Letters, "I perfectly remember Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Pritchard, young as I was, in all their capital characters. Mrs. Cibber had very pathetic powers : her features, though not beautiful, were delicate and

very expressive : but she uniformly pitched her silver voice, so sweetly plaintive, in too high a key to produce that endless variety of intonation with which Mrs. Siddons declaims. Mrs. Siddons," she adds, "had all the pathos of Mrs. Cibber, with a thousand times more variety in its exertions."

Mrs. Pritchard played from 1733 to 1768. She acted in her youth at Bartholomew Fair, where, we are told, she was caressed by the public, particularly for her mode of singing a favourite song, "*Sweet, if you love me, smiling turn.*" It would be at present no great recommendation for a young *débutante* at any of our great theatres to have been *caressed by the public at Bartholomew Fair*. But that place was then more respectable than it now is. The opulent used to resort to it in their carriages. When transferred to the Haymarket, Drury Lane, and Covent Garden, she shone in all walks of character. Natural, *i. e.* unrefined, comedy seems to have been her forte. Her deliverance of sprightly dialogue, according to Davies, was never surpassed, nor perhaps equalled. In her smooth and voluble enunciation not a syllable of articulation was lost to the ear ; and she was a perfect mistress, if we may believe the same writer, of *familiar dramatic eloquence*. Versatility of talent she must have possessed astonishingly, since we find her in the same seasons enjoying the first-rate popularity as *Lady Macbeth*, and as *Mrs. Doll*, in Ben Jonson's "*Alchymist.*" Miss Seward bears testimony to her declamation in tragedy having been more free and natural than Mrs. Cibber's. Churchill speaks highly of her *Zara*, in "*The Mourning Bride*;" and such was her excellence as the *Queen* in "*Hamlet*," that, after she left the stage, it was long before her substitute could be found in the character.

And yet something of her Bartholomew Fair origin may be traced in Mrs. Pritchard's professional characteristics. She never rose to the finest grade even of comedy, but was most famous in scolds and viragoes. In tragedy, though she had a large imposing figure, she wanted grace in her manner, and was too loud and profuse in her expression of grief. Garrick told Tate Wilkinson that she was apt to blubber her sorrows. Her features, it is generally allowed, were rather expressive than pleasing ; nay, to judge by her picture in Mathew's collection, they were coarse and ugly.

Mrs. Siddons says, in her Autograph Recollections, "When I begged Dr. Johnson to let me know his opinion of Mrs. Pritchard, whom I had never seen, he answered, 'Madam, she was a vulgar idiot ; she used to speak of her *gown*, and she never

read any part in a play in which she acted except her own.' Is it possible, thought I," Mrs. Siddons continues, "that Mrs. Pritchard, the greatest of all the *Lady Macbeths*, should never have read the play ? and I concluded that the doctor must have been misinformed ; but I was afterward assured by a gentleman, a friend of Mrs. Pritchard's, that he had supped with her one night after she had acted *Lady Macbeth*, and that she declared she had never perused the whole tragedy :—I cannot believe it."

Well might our great actress wonder at Mrs. Pritchard's sluttishness. Mrs. Siddons's own life was one of constant study and profound reflection on the characters which she played, and on their relations to surrounding parts. Mrs. Siddons had a right to be painted as the Tragic Muse, for her very manner in society was marked by an abstractedness and reserve that were the result of her studiousness. By the force of fancy and reflection she used to be so wrought up in preparing to play the *Lady Constance*, that when she set out from her own house to the theatre she was already *Constance* herself.

Mrs. Pritchard, I dare say, was a *vulgar woman* ; but, when I read the accounts of her acting worthily with Garrick, I cannot consent to Dr. Johnson calling her a *vulgar idiot*, even though she did pin an unnecessary *d* to her gown. Incrusted with indolence as she was, she was still a diamond. At the same time, being palpably devoid of devotion to her profession, she must have been unequal in her appearances. Accordingly, we find that her popularity in London fell ; and, when she went over to Dublin, that she electrified the Irish with disappointment.

Next to Mrs. Pritchard in point of time, our two greatest actresses were Mrs. Yates and Mrs. Crawford. They were contemporaries and rivals ; the former bearing the palm for dignity and sculpturesque beauty, while the latter, though less pleasing in looks, had more passion and versatility.

Anna Maria Grahame, afterward Mrs. Yates, acted from 1754 to 1784. She made her *début* on the Dublin stage, but with so little success that the manager made her a present to dissolve the engagement. She had the courage, nevertheless, to make a second attempt at Drury Lane, as *Marcia*, in "Cato," when her appearance interested the public. By her marriage with Richard Yates, shortly afterward, she acquired a valuable stage friend as well as instructor, and she had the merit of assiduous industry.

From all that I can collect respecting this actress, out of the

remarks of Mr. Beaden and other writers, including even my good-natured friend John Taylor, I believe, an unfavourable profile of her theatrie endowments might be drawn without absolute injustice, though still it would be only on a one-sided view. It appears that her countenance, with the beauty of the antique statue, had also something of its monotony, and that she was defective in parts of tenderness. But it is confessed, even by her censurers, that her fine person, haughty features, and powerful voice carried her well through rage and disdain, and that her declamation was musical. Taylor himself told me that she was the most commanding personage he had ever looked upon before he saw Mrs. Siddons. She was a superb *Medea*; and Wilkinson compares her *Margaret of Anjou* with Mrs. Siddons's *Zara*. Davies says that she was an actress whose just elocution, warm passion, and majestic deportment excited the admiration even of foreigners, and fixed the affection and applause of her own countrymen.

It may also temper our estimate of her defects, to find that the contemporary criticism, which was looked up to as quite authoritative, found fault with her sometimes on very questionable grounds. For instance, the Dramatic Censor, in 1770, asserts that she had not a trace of comedy about her. Now the oldest and most judicious eye-witness of those times who is at present alive, and one whose judgment I would prefer to that of a thousand Dramatic Censors, assures me that, in high comedy, she had an extraordinary degree of grace and refinement. Mr. Godwin, to whom I shall have farther occasion to mention my obligations for the kind interest which he has taken in this work, favoured me lately with the following note, respecting his recollection of Mrs. Yates :

“ 13 Old Palace Yard, Jan. 12, 1834.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ What I seem best to remember her in is *Violante*, in the ‘ Wonder;’ and, though it is sixty years since I saw Garrick and her in that play, I remember a great deal of it as if it had occurred yesterday. It is an admirable acting play, and the two principal performers seemed to leave nothing to be desired. What I recollect best of Mrs. Yates is the scene in which Garrick, having offended her by a jealousy, not altogether without an apparent cause, the lady, conscious of her entire innocence, at length expresses a serious resentment. *Felix* had till then indulged his angry feelings; but finding, at last, that he had gone too far, applies himself with all a lover’s

arts to sooth her. She turns her back to him, and draws away her chair ; he follows her, and draws his chair nearer ; she draws away farther : at length, by his winning entreaties and cajoling, she is gradually induced to melt, and finally makes it up with him. Her condescension in every stage, from its commencement to its conclusion, was admirable. Her dignity was great and lofty, and the effect highly enhanced by her beauty ; and when by degrees she laid aside her frown,—when her lips began to relax towards a smile, while one cloud vanished after another, the spectator thought he had never seen any thing so lovely and irresistible : and the effect was greatly owing to her queen-like majesty. The condescension in a graceful and wayward beauty would have been comparatively nothing,—with Mrs. Yates's figure and demeanour, it laid the whole audience, as well as her lover, at her feet.

“ It is a curious point to distinguish between the loftiness of this actress and that of Mrs. Siddons. In Mrs. Siddons it appeared the untaught loftiness of an elevated soul, working outwards ; but in Mrs. Yates it was the loftiness of a person who had associated only with the majestic and the great—who was therefore complete in herself and in all her motions, and had an infallibility which could never for a moment be called in doubt. Mrs. Siddons was great only as the occasion sustained her ; but Mrs. Yates was great because, by the habit of her soul, it was impossible for her to be otherwise.

“ You desired me also to put down, though of a very trifling nature, a circumstance which I mentioned as occurring in Mrs. Yates's performance of *Lady Constance*, but which is rather characteristic of the fashion of the times than deserving to be imputed to any defect in the performer. When *Lady Constance*, a few lines before her final exit, says, wildly, ‘ *I will not keep this form upon my head, when there is such disorder in my wit*,’—Mrs. Yates, to suit the action to the word, took off a thin cap which surmounted the headdress, and merely placed it on the side of the circumference of her hoop.

I remain, dear sir,

Very faithfully yours,  
Wm. GODWIN.”

Mrs. Crawford acted from 1759 to 1797. Her maiden name was Street : she was the daughter of an apothecary in Bath. When about seventeen she was asked in marriage by a young scion of nobility, but he jilted her, and the misfortune deeply affected her. In order to recover her health and spirits

she was invited by a kind family of friends to visit Yorkshire, and at York she attended the theatre, and beguiled her sorrow so successfully as to become attached to an actor of the name of Dancer, who married her. With him she went on the stage, to the dire offence of her relations, and accepted an engagement in the Dublin theatre, where she acquired an increasing reputation. Her husband died when she was still young, and ere long she gave her hand to Spranger Barry, commonly called the Irish Roscius. He was manager of the stage on which they both acted, so that he secured for her all the capital parts, both comic and tragic, and she filled them brilliantly. Her success coinciding with her husband's, Garrick invited them both, on very high terms, to Drury Lane.

This was the palmy state of her reputation, and for many years she had at least no superior on the stage; but Barry died in 1777. She married a third husband, who was unkind to her, and domestic distress cast such a damp over her genius that frequently she could only be said to have walked through her parts. Mrs. Siddons's success prompted her for a time to emulation, and she came back from Dublin in 1783, to act at Covent Garden. But, by this period, age had made ravages on her beauty, and had brought her faculties to a state somewhat beyond their ripeness. On her appearance on the London stage, momentary gleams of former excellence were indeed displayed, but they only suggested a melancholy comparison between what she then was and what she had once been. John Taylor says, that though once most elegant in her deportment, she became at last rough and coarse, and that her person had the appearance rather of an old man than of one of her own sex.

Let us not, however, form a general estimate of Mrs. Crawford from her appearances during the manifest decline of her powers. For though, even in her best days, it appears that she was too vehement in action, and that she neglected to insinuate herself into admiration from her ambition to create surprise, yet still it is allowed that she could produce astonishment deep and thrilling. The effect of her question, as *Lady Randolph*, in "Douglas," to the peasant, respecting the child, "Was he alive?" was perhaps never surpassed on the stage. Bannister told me that it made rows of spectators start from their seats. Mr. Boaden, I conceive, has been over-anxious to make it appear that Mrs. Crawford's mode of uttering this query, or, as he says, of screaming it, was unnatural, and that it succeeded merely as a *tour de force*, or stage trick. The actress's violence, he alleges, was out of nature, because *Lady*

*Randolph* could not entertain any hope that her son was still alive, even if the peasant had answered *yes*; since she immediately afterward accuses him of having killed the infant. But this is arguing as if a mother in agony about a lost child could calculate as coolly as a chess-player about the moving a pawn. *Lady Randolph* palpably utters that question in a state of transport, as if the life or death of her hopes depended on the instant answer. The inconsistency of her still supposing him dead, though she had heard that he was found alive, is beautifully true to nature. It is fear, rushing in phrensy to precipitate conclusions. That Mrs. Siddons could dispense with extreme vehemence in this interrogation only shows the perfection of her acting in other points. Her *Lady Randolph* was altogether a more sustained and harmonious performance than Mrs. Crawford's. But I believe that she avoided her rival's vehemence of manner in this instance, not from thinking that it was unnatural, but from the fear of being taxed with imitation.

Mrs. Crawford died as late as 1801, and was buried near her second husband, Barry, in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey.

In this retrospect of Mrs. Siddons's predecessors, I have omitted the names of several actresses highly distinguished for their general powers, and partially successful even in tragedy; such as Mrs. Woffington, Anne Bellamy, and others. But as my object, in this digression, was only to advert to names of the first-rate tragic grade, I fear my reader may tax me with a fault the opposite of omission, namely, my having mentioned one or two actresses who were more famous on the comic than the graver stage—I allude to Bracegirdle and Oldfield. Still, however, let me state, in apology, that general tradition represents the former as a beautiful tragic performer, and that the Oldfield could have been no second-rate who could throw enchantment around Thomson's dramatic poetry.

## CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Siddons plays *Isabella*, in the "Fatal Marriage," at Drury Lane—Suitableness of the Part for her first new Trial—Remarks on the Tragedy—Resumption of her Memoranda—She appears as *Euphrasia*, in the "Grecian Daughter"—as *Jane Shore*—in *Calista*—as *Belvidera*—and as *Zara*, in the "Mourning Bride"—Her first Season.

1782.] "I was truly grieved," says Mrs. Siddons in her Memoranda, "to leave my kind friends at Bath, and was also afraid that the power of my voice was not equal to filling a London theatre. My friends, too, were also doubtful; but I soon had reason to think that the bad construction of the Bath theatre, and not the weakness of my voice, was the cause of our mutual fears. On the 10th of October, 1782, I made my first new appearance at Drury Lane, with my own dear beautiful boy, then but eight years old, in Southerne's tragedy of 'Isabella.' This character was judiciously recommended to me by my kind friend Mr. Sheridan, the father of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who had seen me in that play at Bath. The interest he took in my success was like that of a father."

It was a judicious choice undoubtedly. The part of *Isabella* had pathos enough to develop her genius, without complexity to make it an extreme ordeal for her powers on their new great trial; and, with her beautiful little son Henry in her hand, she looked the very personage.\*

Southerne, the author of this play, deserves our gratitude, in common with Otway and Rowe, for having sustained our graver drama in tolerable respectability towards the close of the seventeenth century, at a time when it was threatened with the pestilence of rhyming tragedies; and he is a purer moralist than either Otway or Rowe. Inferior as all the three may be to the more immediate successors of Shakspeare, still they

\* The *Morning Post* for October 10, 1782, gives the following anecdote about young Henry Siddons:—"Mrs. Siddons, of Drury Lane theatre, has a lovely little boy, about eight years old. Yesterday, in the rehearsal of the 'Fatal Marriage,' the boy, observing his mother in the agonies of the dying scene, took the fiction for reality, and burst into a flood of tears, a circumstance which struck the feelings of the company in a singular manner."

will seem entitled to our respect, when we consider that more than a century has elapsed in England without producing any thing like such a triad of dramatic names.

I am glad to find that the poet Gray was a great admirer of Southerne. Critics of far less authority have contemned this very tragedy of "Isabella" for heavy and confused incidents. I confess, curtailed as it now is of the comic underplot,\* which Southerne threw in only in compliance with the grotesque taste of the time, that there seems to me to be not the slightest redundancy of business or dialogue in the piece. On the contrary, the action advances with a beguiling rapidity, and the deeply affecting story has an air of fatalism that always reminds me of the Greek stage. Perhaps in all powerful tragedies this air is to be traced. It is a cold, dramatic achievement, to show us only the ordinary and necessary connexion between the passions and the misfortunes of our species. The poetic invention that affects us to the deepest degree is that which teaches us by what surprising coincidences the passions of the bad may work more misery than even they themselves intend; and how the shafts of cruelty may strike the innocent with more than their natural force, coming like arrows impelled by the wind. My greatest objection to the tragedy of "Isabella" is, that old *Biron* moralizes most unnecessarily at the end of it; for, when poetry affects us, the heart will find its own moral.

Speaking of her first appearance on this occasion, Mrs. Siddons says, "For a whole fortnight before this (to me) memorable day, I suffered, from nervous agitation, more than can be imagined. No wonder! for my own fate and that of my little family hung upon it. I had quitted Bath, where all my efforts had been successful, and I feared lest a second failure in London might influence the public mind greatly to my prejudice, in the event of my return from Drury Lane, disgraced as I formerly had been. In due time I was summoned to the rehearsal of 'Isabella.' Who can imagine my terror?

\* Gray, with all his admiration of Southerne, inveighs severely against his comic intermixtures in this tragedy; and, in fact, in its original state there was a complete comic underplot, some of which seems to have been borrowed from Boccaccio. A jealous old fellow gets a sleeping potion, is put into a tomb, and made to believe that he has been dead. When he awakes he is reconciled to his wife, and promises never more to be jealous of her. When the play was revived at Drury Lane, in 1757, this comic stuff was omitted, but the original name was not changed from that of the "Fatal Marriage, or Innocent Adultery," to "Isabella," till several years after.

I feared to utter a sound above an audible whisper ; but by degrees enthusiasm cheered me into a forgetfulness of my fears, and I unconsciously threw out my voice, which failed not to be heard in the remotest part of the house, by a friend who kindly undertook to ascertain the happy circumstance. The countenances, no less than tears and flattering encouragements, of my companions imbodied me more and more ; and the second rehearsal was even more affecting than the first. Mr. King, who was then manager, was loud in his applauses. This second rehearsal took place on the 8th of October, 1782, and on the evening of that day I was seized with a nervous hoarseness, which made me extremely wretched ; for I dreaded being obliged to defer my appearance on the 10th, longing, as I most earnestly did, at least to know the worst. I went to bed, therefore, in a state of dreadful suspense. Awaking the next morning, however, though out of restless, unrefreshing sleep, I found, upon speaking to my husband, that my voice was very much clearer. This, of course, was a great comfort to me ; and, moreover, the sun, which had been completely obscured for many days, shone brightly through my curtains. I hailed it, though tearfully, yet thankfully, as a happy omen ; and even now I am not ashamed of *this* (as it may perhaps be called) childish superstition. On the morning of the 10th, my voice was, most happily, perfectly restored ; and again '*The blessed sun shone brightly on me.*' On this eventful day my father arrived to comfort me, and to be a witness of my trial. He accompanied me to my dressing-room at the theatre. There he left me ; and I, in one of what I call my desperate tranquillities, which usually impress me under terrific circumstances, there completed my dress, to the astonishment of my attendants, without uttering one word, though often sighing most profoundly.

"At length I was called to my fiery trial. I found my venerable father behind the scenes, little less agitated than myself. The awful consciousness that one is the sole object of attention to that immense space, lined as it were with human intellect from top to bottom, and all around, may perhaps be imagined, but can never be described, and by me can never be forgotten.\*

"Of the general effect of this night's performance I need not speak : it has already been publicly recorded. I reached my

\* The other parts of the play were thus cast : *Biron*, Smith ; *Villeroy*, Palmer ; *Carlos*, Farren ; *Count Baldwin*, Packer ; *Nurse*, Mrs. Love.

own quiet fireside on retiring from the scene of reiterated shouts and plaudits. I was half-dead ; and my joy and thankfulness were of too solemn and overpowering a nature to admit of words, or even tears. My father, my husband, and myself sat down to a frugal neat supper, in a silence uninterrupted, except by exclamations of gladness from Mr. Siddons. My father enjoyed his refreshments ; but occasionally stopped short, and, laying down his knife and fork, lifting up his venerable face, and throwing back his silver hair, gave way to tears of happiness. We soon parted for the night ; and I, worn out with continually broken rest and laborious exertion, after an hour's retrospection, (who can conceive the intenseness of that reverie ?) fell into a sweet and profound sleep, which lasted to the middle of the next day. I arose alert in mind and body.

“ I should be afraid to say,” she continues, “ how many times ‘ Isabella’ was repeated successively with still increasing favour. I was now highly gratified by a removal from my very indifferent and inconvenient dressing-room to one on the stage-floor, instead of climbing a long staircase ; and this room (oh, unexpected happiness !) had been Garrick’s dressing-room. It is impossible to conceive my gratification, when I saw my own figure in the self-same glass which had so often reflected the face and form of that unequalled genius : not perhaps without some vague fanciful hope of a little degree of inspiration from it. About this time I was honoured by the whole body of the Law with a present of a purse of one hundred guineas.”

Mrs. Siddons performed *Isabella* eight times between the 10th and 30th of October. The next character that was allotted to her was *Euphrasia*, in the “ Grecian Daughter.”† In this part, Mrs. Yates, with the aid of Henderson’s powerful acting, still maintained a semblance of rivalry with the Siddons : but it was only a semblance ; for the querulous remonstrances which Mrs. Yates’s friends put forth in the newspapers against “ *the infatuated attention that was paid to the rising actress* ” sorely betrayed to which of the rivals public favour had inclined.

\* The high compliment paid by the gentlemen of the Bar to the unrivalled merit of Mrs. Siddons is unexampled in the history of the English theatre, except in the instance of the celebrated Mr. Booth, who, on his first appearance in the character of Addison’s *Cato*, was presented by the Tories with a purse of fifty guineas, for so nobly declaiming against a perpetual Dictator.

† On the 30th of October the other parts of the “ Grecian Daughter ” were thus cast : *Evander*, Bensley ; *Dionysius*, Palmer ; *Philotas*, Brereton ; *Phocion*, Farren.

Mrs. Siddons's admirers troubled the press with no lamentations for Mrs. Yates's popularity : they only regretted that the talents of their favourite, instead of being wholly devoted to Shakspeare and other great dramatists, should be wasted on Murphy's tragedy, which the *Morning Post*, a paper at that time ably conducted, denominated "*an abortion of Melpomene.*"

This was rather hard language ; for there must be some merit in a drama that can be made the medium of popular acting ; and the "*Grecian Daughter*" is a practical favourite with players. Since its first appearance, sixty-three years ago, there has been no great tragic actress who has not thought the part of *Euphrasia* worthy of her ambition. At the same time, the "*Grecian Daughter*," though not an abortion of *Melpomene*, is not one of her loveliest brood. Its merit may be placed on a level with that of our best pantomimes and melodramas. It is a tolerable tragedy in all but the words.

The wonderful power of great players to delight us on the stage with dramatic poetry which we *read* with indifference,—their power, we might rather say, of putting poetry into action where they have little or none of it on the author's page, is a subject of curious interest, and so much worthy of better discussion than I can bring to it, that I hazard with diffidence the most general remarks. I have said that there must be some merit in a drama which can be made the medium of popular acting ; and this truism is so palpable, that I am not afraid of the reader contradicting it, but only of his smiling at being told what might be taken for granted. But, supposing you went a little farther, and were to say that a drama, which good acting can render impressive, must necessarily have a great deal of merit, you would soon find yourself mistaken, and be obliged to draw back into the former vague and trite position : for it is not more certain that the Northern Lights can play upon ice, than that electrifying acting has often irradiated dramas very frigid to the reader. What is the "*Cato*" of Addison to our perusal ? and yet how nobly John Kemble performed its hero ! The greatest acting, it is true, cannot *create a soul under the ribs of death*, nor reconcile us to false or insipid views of human nature. A tragedy, to affect us by the best possible acting, must assuredly have some leading conceptions of grandeur, some general outlines of affecting character and situation. Nevertheless, it is astonishing how faint and general those outlines may be, and yet enable, or rather permit, the great stage-artist to fill up what he finds a comparative blank into a glow-

ing picture. Mrs. Siddons did this in the "Grecian Daughter;" and so did Fanny Kemble.

Shakspeare's plays would continue to be read, if there was not a theatre in existence; whereas, if poor Murphy, as a tragedian, were to be banished from the stage to the library, it may be said, in the fullest sense of the phrase, that he would be laid on the shelf. And yet Murphy might affirm with truth, that in playing his heroine, Mrs. Siddons herself increased her reputation. The part of *Isabella* had developed her strength as well as her tenderness; but *Euphrasia* allowed her to assume a royal loftiness still more imposing (at least to the many), and a look of majesty which she alone could assume. When she rushed on the stage addressing the Grecian patriots, "War on, ye heroes!" she was a picture to every eye, and she spoke passion to every heart. I have seen the countenances of her oldest contemporaries lighten up with pleasure in trying to do justice to their recollections of her *Euphrasia*. They spoke of the semi-diamond on her brow, and of the veil that flowed so gracefully on her shoulders; but they always concluded by owning that words could not describe "her heroic loveliness." The finest effect that she produced in the part was at the crisis when *Philotas* pretends that her father was dead, and that his body had been thrown into the sea. Here she acted filial anxiety with a fidelity so terrible, that the spectators counted the moments of suspense, and felt that a few more of them would have been intolerable.

Nov. 8, 1782. The next part in which she appeared was *Jane Shore*.\* Here she tried her powers in a character as widely as possible contrasted with *Euphrasia*; and made a transition from the proudest pomp to the most desolate pathos of tragedy. I am glad that I can recollect the great actress in *Jane Shore*; for it was a spectacle that struck me with a degree of wonder, of illusion, and of intense commiseration, that neither she nor any other performer ever excited in my mind. I will not say that it is the part in which I should chiefly choose to see her once more, if I had the power, by some miracle, of seeing her again. It was not her most poetical, nay, it was not her most pleasing part: on the contrary, the semblance of her physical suffering was the more appalling for a sort of prosaic closeness to reality. But it

\* The other parts were thus cast: *Hastings*, Smith; *Shore*, Bensley; *Gloucester*, J. Aickin; *Alicia*, Mrs. Ward.

was terrible and perfect acting up to the truth of nature. Mr. Boaden tells us, that she presented at the outset of the play a dignified aspect, which could never have belonged to the mistress of Edward the Fourth ; and that the first look of her threw a doubt upon her situation and its sorrows. Whether this doubt ever crossed the minds of three persons among her spectators is very uncertain ; but if it did, it was immediately lost in different feelings. For Mr. Boaden himself, in his next paragraph, commemorates what can be well recollected, namely, "the sobs and shrieks among the tender part of her audience, and those tears which manhood at first struggled to suppress, but at last grew proud of indulging." Fainting fits were long and frequent in the house.

And yet this fearful semblance of reality, if it did not strictly accord with Lord Bacon's definition, of poetry being that which accommodates the show of things to the wishes of the mind, was still in so far poetical that its terrors were sheathed in some welcome illusions. It was something to have so romantic a legendary favourite as *Jane Shore* restored, like a friend in a dream, though only to hear her speak, and to answer her with our tears. And so far was my imagination loath to identify Mrs. Siddons with the heroine she represented, that I remember as if it were yesterday, my illusion amounting, as far as waking thoughts could go, to the belief that I was looking on reality, and seeing History revived before me.

The story of *Jane Shore* has certainly one disadvantage as a tragic subject, namely, in the catastrophe being a death by hunger. And yet the poet has met this difficulty with some skill ; for, before he compels us to shudder at her physical sufferings, he has wound us up to a high interest in her moral character, and prepared us to regard her as expiring—not solely from corporeal inanition, but from having her death at least accelerated by mental agitation. Rowe is judicious in giving her a modest and gradual progress in our sympathy. She is at first only a desolate penitent, who says of her own beauty,

" Sin and misery,  
Like loathsome weeds, have overrun the soil,  
And the destroyer Shame hath laid all waste."

She is at the outset nothing but contrition ; and her repentance-sheet shrouds from our view the fine lineaments of her heroic and womanly nature. But these come forth, when her fondness for Edward's memory breaks out in her anxiety for his

children, though in a manner so delicate, that her husband himself cannot be imagined to take umbrage at it. Under this feeling she defies the tyrant *Gloucester*. It was here that the part ascended to the level of Mrs. Siddons's powers,—that her voice took a richness beyond the wailing of penitence, and her cheek a nobler glow than the blush of shame. The fervour of her benediction on *Hastings*, though he had insulted her, when, in gratitude for his protecting Edward's children, she exclaims,

“Reward him for the noble deed, just heavens !”

makes *Jane Shore* now possess our hearts as a heroine. If ever words were pronounced with thrilling prolongation, it was when Mrs. Siddons uttered that line,

“The poor, forsaken, royal little ones !”

Her death-scene in *Jane Shore* would have baffled the power of the pencil, for it was a succession of astonishing changes. Her eagle eye, obedient to her will, at times parted with its lustre, and, though open, looked sightless and bewildered; but resumed its fire as wonderfully, when, “*with life's last spark that fluttered and expired*,” she turned to her husband, and uttered the heart-piercing words,

“Forgive me!——but forgive me !”

While her impression as *Jane Shore* was still fresh in the public mind, and while so many great tragic parts remained untouched by her, it may well surprise us to find her next appearing in a prose tragedy, which had no name to recommend it, and which was never found to be worth publishing. This was the “Fatal Interview,” by Thomas Hull.\* It was not

\* This piece, like several others by the same author, was never published; though he was a voluminous writer of plays, novels, tales, and verses. Thomas Hull was founder of the Theatrical Fund, an institution that does honour to his memory. He was for many years deputy-manager of Covent Garden, and always valued himself on his address in making apologies to the public. During the riots of 1780, the mob pelted his house with stones, in consequence of his having sent out to them a barrel of small-beer instead of porter. The deputy-manager appeared on the first floor with his velvet cap, and, after making three low bows, gave scope to his apologetical eloquence in these words: “Ladies and Gentlemen, Upon my honour I have sent to Gifford's brewhouse for some porter. In the mean time, I must humbly solicit your usual indulgence.”

absolutely hissed off the stage ; but it was so coolly received, and so many reflections were cast on Mrs. Siddons's genius being thrown away on such a piece, that it was withdrawn, after dragging on to the third night. Mr. Genest says that Sheridan damned the play to save the actress : but the play appears to have damned itself.

On the 29th of November, she appeared for the first time as *Calista*, in the "Fair Penitent;" and her success in the character was another large step in her popularity.\* It has been common with dramatic critics to abuse *Calista* as a person most improperly named a penitent. This objection to her character is much older than the days of Gifford and Hazlitt ; but like many an old judgment, it is unjust : for, though reluctant to repent, she becomes in the end a deep and true penitent, and may well say,

"I have more real anguish in my heart  
Than all their pedant discipline can show."

Those who reproach *Calista* for not being all of a sudden repentant, forget how contemptible she would be if she were so represented. A female loathing her frailty the moment after detection, would virtually acknowledge it to have sprung from a momentary impulse, and not from that boundless affection and confidence, which, however misplaced, is at least some palliation of her fault to the charity of others, and still more naturally a pretext for slow self-condemnation in the delinquent herself. *Calista* is the victim of profound attachment. *Jane Shore* had had full leisure to repent of her errors ;—but *Calista* is exposed to shame, while she is yet under the spell and illusion of her passion for *Lothario*. Love, be it ever so illicit, is of all passions the least self-condemning while the mind is under its full dominion. It may reproach the infatuated heart in its growth and decay ; it may have its morning and evening shadows for the conscience, but it has *none* at its vertical height.

And, after all, while *Calista* is slow to reproach herself for a natural passion, she is not without some right to speak of "a base world," when she is doomed to infamy by the ingratitude of her seducer ; and, when she is forced to marry the man whom she cannot love by her father, who, after raving about her sainted mother, and *Calista's* prattling infant days, takes

\* The other parts were thus cast : *Lothario*, Palmer ; *Horatio*, Benson ; *Sciolto*, J. Aickin ; *Lavinia*, Mrs. Bulkely.

upon himself the fatherly duty of her executioner. If there was any thing in the character of *Calista* to make it worthy of the Siddons, it was the heroine's slowly-penitent pride, which capitulates only in the last extremities.

I cannot, to be sure, confess an unqualified admiration of this tragedy; for, though *Calista* acts consistently with the domination of passion over her mind, yet the exposure of a frail woman's dishonour seems a bad tragic subject to set out with. Her errors are not, like those of *Jane Shore*, half hid from us by the conception of their remote occurrence, but are blazoned in fresh discovery. The mind recoils from the reception of a proud and beautiful female upon the stage, being prepared by the description which her betrayer gives of the scene and circumstances of her seduction.

Rowe is, however, an insinuating dramatist; and the protracted martyrdom of *Calista* is, in spite of the faults of the tragedy, very affecting. I never saw our great actress in this character; but I can easily imagine the new scope that it gave to her powers. A sensible writer of that early period remarks of her performance, that "having to show in *Calista* that haughty affectation of being above control, which the deviation from virtue ever produces in a proud mind, in this struggle between pride and shame, she walked with greater precipitation, her gestures were more frequent and more violent, and her eyes were restless and suspicious." *Calista* was therefore a new character for the display of her genius; and it particularly gave a new modification to that passion of pride which she was unparalleled in expressing. Neither *Isabella* nor *Jane Shore* exhibits such complicated agony as *Calista*. The pride of *Isabella* has to combat only with her destiny, and the shame of *Jane Shore* is aggravated by no feeling of pride. Neither of them is so distracted as Rowe's heroine, between passions entirely opposite, or put on the rack, as she is, between virtue and vice. *Calista's* shame inflames her pride, while her pride makes her shame more excruciating. She perishes, like Laocoon, between double stings; and, though not perhaps a fair penitent for the stage, she is a strong picture of unfortunate human nature.

Such acting as Mrs. Siddons's had never been brought to Rowe's poetry, at least during the last century. Neither Mrs. Cibber nor Mrs. Crawford is alleged, by their warmest eulogists, to have been so equal to the haughtiness of *Calista's* part. Mrs. Yates, in performing it, departed from her usual

grace, and sawed the air with her arms ; and Mrs. Woffington, though pleasing to the eye, used to bark out the *Fair Penitent* with most dissonant notes.

For her benefit, on the 14th of December, Mrs. Siddons chose the part of *Belvidera*, in "Venice Preserved,"\* a tragedy which so constantly commands the tears of audiences, that it would be a work of supererogation for me to extol its tenderness. There may be dramas where human character is pictured with subtler skill,—though *Belvidera* might rank among Shakspeare's creations ; and "Venice Preserved" may not contain, like "Macbeth" and "Lear," certain high conceptions, which exceed even the power of stage representation ;—but it is as full as a tragedy can be of all the pathos that is transfusible into action.

I am glad that I have far better testimonies than my own to offer in proof of the great actress's triumph in this character ; for, to say the truth, when I saw her perform *Belvidera*, she was in the autumn of her beauty, large, august, and matronly ; and my imagination had been accustomed to picture the object of *Jaffier's* fondness as a much younger woman. Accordingly, I recollect having thought (it was a new thought, indeed, for acting to inspire) that I could conceive another actress to play the part more perfectly. But, without retracting my general opinion that she continued to act this character when she was somewhat too old for it, I can easily conceive that in my boyish criticism I may have judged of her unspiritually, and too much by externals. Attending to the woman more than the actress, I dare say I was blind to innumerable beauties, that made her *Belvidera*, even late in life, one of her finest performances in the eyes of better judges than myself. When she was young, there were no two opinions about her perfection in the part.

I have already acknowledged that I consult the newspapers of those times for remarks on her acting with nothing like unqualified confidence. At the same time, I should not consult them at all, unless their spontaneous or well expressed opinions were not occasionally entitled to fair belief. Now the language of her daily contemporary critics, respecting her appearance in *Belvidera*, is so warm, so unanimous, and, above all, so circumstantial, that I cannot help receiving it as truth. They point out with rapture the particular traits of her excel-

\* Cast of parts ; *Jaffier*, Brereton ; *Pierre*, Bensley ; *Priuli*, J. Aickin ; *Renault*, Packer.

lence, such as the heart-wringing effect of her call to *Jaffier*, "Oh, thou unkind one!"—the magic delicacy with which she bade him remember the hour of twelve;—and the electrifying manner in which she sprang to his arms, on his threat to kill her. I should take Mr. Boaden's testimony to the same effect, even if it stood quite solitary; but I like it none the worse for circumstantially agreeing with the above critiques: and his description of her *Belvidera* is able, minute, and copious. She attached herself, by this part, with a new and bright link to public favour.

Mr. Boaden inveighs, and not unjustly, against the omission of some lines of the tragedy, both beautiful and unexceptionable, in the prompt-book from which Mrs. Siddons acted. These were tasteless omissions I own; but, in a general view, no play was ever more indebted to the stage for purification than "Venice Preserved." As it originally came out, it was stamped with all the profligacy of the age, and offered the melancholy spectacle of genius prostituted to court corruption. It is generally supposed that, in the character of the buffoon-senator *Antonio*, the poet meant to ridicule Lord Shaftesbury; and from the primitive indecent prologue, it may also be inferred that he made another hit at his lordship, in portraying the conspirator *Renault*.

This chain-shot satire seems to have been discharged against Shaftesbury by the order of Charles II., a prince who, with the love of monopolies that was inherent in his family, seems to have thought that he had a right to exclude all others from competition with him in profligacy. To preserve consistency, the poet dedicated his tragedy to the Duchess of Portsmouth, congratulating her on being the king's mistress, and on having lately borne him an illegitimate child.

In his utmost destitution, Otway appears less humiliated than in this dedication. I am sorry that his recent editors have not, in mercy to his memory, forborne to reprint all the disgusting dialogue which has been long since expunged from stage-representation. The courtesan, *Aquillia*, I believe, has ceased to disgrace the *dramatis personæ* since the beginning of the last century. George II., so at least says the "Dramatic Censor," commanded all those scenes of "Venice Preserved," which had been already rejected by public modesty,

\* It is said, in this prologue, that if Poland had heard of *Renault*, she would have made him her king. Shaftesbury's enemies alleged that he was ambitious of the crown of Poland.

to be restored when the play was to be acted before him ; but the audience, with one consent, hooted them off. If this be true, it is probable that our German liege acted more from ignorance of the English language than from profligacy.

The alterations of "Venice Preserved" have redeemed it as a public spectacle and as a work of taste. *Pierre* is a miserable conspirator, as Otway first painted him, impelled to treason by his love of a courtesan, and his jealousy of *Antonio*. But his character, as it now comes forward, is a mixture of patriotism and of excusable misanthropy. Even in the more modern prompt-books, an improving curtailment has been introduced. Until the middle of the last century, the ghosts of *Jaffier* and *Pierre* used to come in upon the stage, haunting *Belvidera* in her last agonies, which, God knows ! require no aggravation from spectral agency.

Never were beauties and faults more easily separated than those of this tragedy. The former, in its purification for the stage, came off like dirt from a fine statue, taking away nothing from its symmetrical surface, and leaving us only to wonder how the author himself should have soiled it with such disfigurements.\*

For her second benefit this season she chose the part of *Zara*, in the "Mourning Bride." In this character I never had the good fortune to see her ; and, if it were not for the information I have received from others, I should at this moment remain half incredulous that even *her* powers of acting could have made *Zara* a captivating heroine. I by no means wish to rank among the censurers of this tragedy who call it a pantomime. Its concinnity of structure as a drama, and its many impassioned and picturesque passages, I admit and admire. But, in reading the "Mourning Bride," I cannot like *Zara*, and I feel a predominant interest for her tamer rival, *Almelia*. Having never seen our great actress as the captive queen, I was the more anxious to consult the most trustworthy lovers of the drama who could re-

\* It is pretty generally known that Otway founded his tragedy on St. Real's History of the Venetian Conspiracy in 1618. Nearly the whole of the *dramatis personæ* are real persons. *Belvidera*, however, is fictitious. The real *Renault* was no villain, and the real *Pierre* was privately strangled on board his own ship, by order of the Venetian senate. The prose and true *Jaffier* was not melted in his faith to the conspiracy by a woman's tears, but was struck with compunction during a city jubilee, when he contrasted its gaiety with the horrors and massacres that would eventually result from the plot. Otway's *Jaffier* is more pathetic and dramatic, but St. Real's History is wonderfully impressive. Voltaire compares its author to *Sallust*, and not unworthily.

member her in the part ; and among these the first with whom I happened to converse on the subject was Mr. Godwin. I shall never forget the pleasure I received from the vivid remarks of this patriarch of our living literature. The freshness of his recollections, and his hearty interest in the history of the stage, are worthy of his gifted genius. He spoke to me of Garrick very fervidly ; but he said that, in spite of Garrick's superior versatility, Mrs. Siddons showed at times conceptions of her characters which he thought more sublime than any thing even in Garrick's acting. I confessed to my philosophical friend, that I wondered how any powers of acting could throw magnificence around a character so vicious, so selfish, and so hateful, as *Zara* ; and I asked him how the part of *Almeria*, who ought indeed to be the heroine of the tragedy, had affected him ? His answer was, " I recollect nothing about the acting of *Almeria*, for the disdain and indignation of the Siddons, in *Zara*, engrossed all attention, and swept away the possibility of interest in any thing else. Her magnificence in the part was inexpressible. It was worth the trouble of a day's journey to see her but walk down the stage. Her *Zara* was not inferior even to her *Lady Macbeth*. "

It was at this time that she sat for her portrait, as *Isabella*, to the distinguished artist, Hamilton. Her immense popularity was now shown, in the general enthusiasm to see her picture, even when it was scarcely finished. Carriages thronged the artist's door ; and, if every fine lady who stept out of them did not actually weep before the painting, they had all of them, at least, their white handkerchiefs ready for that demonstration of their sensibility.

One day, after her sitting, Mr. Hamilton and his wife were bidding good morning to the great actress, and accompanying her down stairs, when they pointed out to her her own resemblance to an antique sculpture of Ariadne that stood on the staircase. Mrs. Siddons was taken by surprise, and her honesty was here a traitor to her vanity. She clasped her hands in delight, and said, " Yes, it is very—" but, immediately recollecting herself, before she got out the word *like*, substituted the word *beautiful*. " It is so very beautiful that you must be flattering me." She then sat down on the staircase to contemplate the sculpture, frequently exclaiming, " It is so very beautiful that you must be flattering me." She departed, however, evidently well pleased to believe in the likeness : but it would require one to be as handsome as herself to have a right to blame her self-complacency.

On the 5th of June she acted *Isabella* for the twenty-fourth time ; and, having performed, in all, about eighty nights, and on six of them for the benefit of others, she closed a season of as brilliant success as her own wishes could have shaped, even if they had been castle-building. Her fellow-performers complained that, after her tragic parts, the best comic acting of after-pieces could not raise the spirits of the audience ; and this continued to be the case till the enchantress, Mrs. Jordan, appeared on the same boards.

It has been said of Mrs. Siddons, by the last historian of the stage,\* that, even in this first season, she made all other actresses be forgotten. Perhaps it would be more correct to say, though it ought to be said with a due sympathy for the previous idols of the public, that she left to her still nominal rivals, Mrs. Yates and Mrs. Crawford, a remnant of reputation more painful than utter oblivion.

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## CHAPTER V.

Her Second Season at Drury Lane—Plays *Isabella*, in “Measure for Measure”—Performs in the “Gamester” with her brother, John Kemble—Performs *Constance*, in “King John”—Her own Criticisms on the Character—Plays *Lady Randolph*—The *Countess of Salisbury*, and *Sigismunda* in Thomson’s Tragedy—Conclusion of the Season, 1783—4.

AFTER four months, during which she acted at Liverpool, Dublin, and Cork, Mrs. Siddons returned to Drury Lane in the October of 1783, and commenced her second season, by royal command, with *Isabella*, in the “Fatal Marriage.” Their majesties, accompanied by the Prince of Wales, the Princess Royal, and the Princess Augusta, honoured the performance with their attendance.\*

Hitherto, since her return to the London stage, Mrs. Siddons

\* Mr. Genest.

† The *London Chronicle* for October 9, 1783, gives so graphic an account of the canopies erected on this occasion for the royal spectators, together with the dresses they wore, that I could find in my heart to transcribe it as a picture of by-gone fashions, if I were not afraid of surly criticism demanding, What have valances, velvet draperies, golden tassels, and silks and satins, to do with Mrs. Siddons’s history ?

had attempted none of the characters of Shakspeare ; and, at this period, notwithstanding all her popularity, I find that she had still some detractors, who pretended to doubt whether she had courage to make the attempt, or would succeed if she should make it. To this skepticism, whether it was sincere or affected, she put a practical termination, on the 3d of November, by playing *Isabella*, in "Measure for Measure," in a manner that commanded undivided applause.\*

This success was an epoch in her life ; not for its merely silencing a few detractors, but for the triumph of uniting her name with Shakspeare's, in the most solemn and religious of his characters.

There is so entire an exemption in Shakspeare's genius from any thing assimilating to cant or puritanism, that we listen with unsuspicuous reverence to his morality when he pitches it at the highest key ; and no creation of his mind gives us a finer proof of its sublime moral tone than the saintly character of his *Isabella*. - By the eloquence of this fair agent he illustrates the momentous truth, that the worth of life is inferior to the worth of honour ; a truth seemingly romantic, but the denial of which, if it were negatived as unreal, would involve the debasement and wreck of our species. Substitute for this principle the doctrine of Hobbes, that the preservation of *its own life* is the paramount duty of every human being, and see, by Hobbes's own theory of government, what a slave and mere animal you would make of man. In upholding the opposite doctrine, Shakspeare writes with his natural fearlessness : he makes no sophistical juggling, and tells no lies, like the stoics, about death being only an imaginary evil. On the contrary, he confronts the novice of St. Clair with a brother pleading to her for his life ; and he depicts the horrors of the agonized petitioner with a fidelity that makes us shudder. And yet he inspires his heroine with sufficient eloquence to convince us of the *sacred principle*.

I deny not that the page of Shakspeare is competent, even in reading it, to inspire us with an exulting sympathy with *Isabella*, and to make us exclaim, "No ! let not the purity of so hallowed a being be sacrificed for the life of a dastard." But it was wonderful to feel what freshness and force *this* sentiment acquired from our actress's impersonation of the

\* Cast of the other parts in "Measure for Measure :" *Duke*, Smith ; *Lucio*, Lee Lewis ; *Angelo*, Palmer ; *Claudio*, Brereton ; *Clown*, Parsons ; *Escalus*, J. Aickin : *Mariana*, Mrs. Ward.

heroine. The simplicity of her dress might be described, but not the moral simplicity of her demeanour, that brought the expression of lofty feelings in close succession to meekness, and made her final sternness to her brother as becoming as her former sisterly suavity. It is true, that, in *Isabella*, she had less scope for impassioned acting than in *Constance* and *Lady Macbeth*; she had to represent principle more than passion: but Mrs. Siddons, with that air of uncompromising principle in her physiognomy, which struck you at first sight, and was verified by the longest acquaintance, looked the novice of St. Clair so perfectly, that I am sure, if Shakspeare had seen her among a thousand candidates for the part, he would have beckoned to her to come and perform it.

Hitherto Mrs. Siddons had been but indifferently supported by actors in the highest tragic parts at Drury Lane. Henderson unfortunately played at the other house. Bensley delivered dialogue with a propriety of emphasis and a nicety of discrimination that evinced a sound and comprehensive judgment; but when we are told that his voice and manner were well suited to *Malvolio*, and to the *Ghost* in "Hamlet," we are naturally prepared for what is added by his most candid describers,—that he showed a mind labouring against natural defects. He had an ungainly solemnity of action, and a nasal pronunciation. A good judge of acting, who remembers him, tells me that, in seeing him on the stage, his mind alternated between admiration of Bensley's sagacity as an actor, and regret that one so unfitted by nature for acting should have chosen it for his profession.

Smith has been immortalized by Churchill as a gentlemanly actor: but his forte was comedy. His person was agreeable, his countenance engaging, and his voice smooth and powerful, though monotonous. A potent physical personage he must have been, who could swim a league at sea, drink his bottle of port, and after fatigue and conviviality, commit his part distinctly to memory. He was respectable in *Richard the Third*, and a tolerable *Hotspur*.\* Mr. Boaden, in mentioning Smith,

\* In the Catalogue of Mathews's "Gallery of Theatrical Portraits," I find a quotation from Charles Lamb, stating that Bensley was an *inimitable Hotspur*. If so, Mr. Genest, in his "Account of the English Stage," is strangely at fault in omitting *Hotspur* among the parts of Bensley. But, much as I respect both the taste and sincerity of Charles Lamb, I should suspect that he is here speaking from some exaggerated impressions made upon him in his boyish years. Bensley great in *Hotspur*! The thing is impossible.

speaks of the "hunter's health that glowed on his shoulders." It was a strange place, if he had clothes on his back, for his health to make its appearance; but he means, I suppose, that Smith had no great refinement as an actor.

Aickin can scarcely be quoted as even considerable in tragedy. His forte lay in the representation of an honest steward, or an affectionate parent. Brereton was, with the exception of John Kemble, the most promising young actor of the day; but his career was short,\* and his end unfortunate. He died, while yet a young man, in an asylum for the deranged.

But Mrs. Siddons this season found a coadjutor in acting, who was an acquisition to the English stage, and not the less acceptable to her for being her own brother. John Kemble had not, indeed, yet reached the height of his reputation, but he was fast advancing to it; and he was already so decidedly popular, that the prejudices which had pursued her sisters for merely daring to act on the same boards with Mrs. Siddons, were dropped in welcoming him. His acknowledged talents and heroic appearance disarmed invidious, or, at all events, contemptuous comparison of him with his noble sister. There was a pleasing harmony in their manner, although hers was the more natural; and, side by side, they appeared the two noblest specimens that could be produced of the breed of England. Her first appearance in conjunction with her brother was in the "Gamester," in which she played *Mrs. Beverley* (Nov. 22.)† Their success was brilliant. As this tragedy has some great beauties, and as it continually affects large audiences with strong emotions, I shall trouble the reader with no lucubrations of my own on its imperfections, but content myself with stating the fact, that Mrs. Siddons made it deeply affecting. Mr. Young, the actor, related to me an instance of her power in the part of *Mrs. Beverley* over his own feelings. He was acting *Beverley* with her on the Edinburgh stage, and they had proceeded as far as the 4th scene in the 5th act, when *Beverley* has swallowed the poison, and when *Bates* comes in, and says to the dying sufferer, "Jarvis found you quarrelling with *Lewson* in the streets last night," *Mrs. Beverley*

\* Brereton was considered but a third or fourth rate actor till the time that Mrs. Siddons acted *Betidera*. There was none of the actors already celebrated who could be trusted with the part of *Jaffier*. To Brereton the part was given as an experiment; he was inspired by Mrs. Siddons, and acted to admiration.

† Cast of parts: *Beverley*, Kemble; *Stukely*, Palmer; *Jarvis*, J. Aickin; *Charlotte*, Mrs. Brereton.

says, “No! I am sure he did not!” to which *Jarvis* replies, “*Or if I did?*”—meaning, it may be supposed, to add, “the fault was not with my master:”—but the moment he utters the words “*Or if I did?*” *Mrs. Beverley* exclaims, “*Tis false, old man!—they had no quarrel—there was no cause for quarrel!*” In uttering this, *Mrs. Siddons* caught hold of *Jarvis*, and gave the exclamation with such piercing grief, that *Mr. Young* said his throat swelled, and his utterance was choked. He stood unable to speak the few words which, as *Beverley*, he ought to have immediately delivered: the pause lasted long enough to make the prompter several times repeat *Beverley’s* speech, till *Mrs. Siddons*, coming up to her fellow-actor, put the tips of her fingers on his shoulders, and said, in a low voice, “*Mr. Young, recollect yourself!*”

It does credit to the taste of George the Third, that his wish to see the *Siddons* and the *Kemble* together, in the tragedy of “*King John*” was the immediate cause of her coming out this season in the new character of *Constance*.\* I find, to my surprise, the contemporary daily newspapers exceedingly truculent in their remarks on her performance of this part; and if their testimony were to be solely relied upon, we must believe that she was at first an infinitely less popular *Constance* than she ultimately proved to be. Attaching, as I do, a certain consequence to the newspaper criticism of that period,† I should nevertheless be sorry to give it my arbitrary credence only when it speaks in favour of my heroine. It was her boast that she gradually improved in all her characters, and that she never repeated her performance of any part without studying it anew to the utmost of her power and leisure. Thus I can believe it possible, that she was not at this period the same perfect *Lady Constance*, such as I saw her some ten years afterward. Besides, the entire tragedy of “*King John*,” from conforming to history more than to our wishes, disappoints us by *Constance* belonging to it only in two acts, and disappearing before its catastrophe. This circumstance is a disadvantage to any actress, however great she may be in the part; or, at least, a difficulty not likely to be overcome, till, by repeated impressions, she has won the public to feel the tragedy worth seeing

\* Cast of the other parts: *King John*, *Kemble*; *Falconbridge*, *Smith*; *Hubert*, *Bensley*; *King of France*, *J. Aickin*; *Dauphin*, *Barrymore*; *Pandulph*, *Palmer*; *Chatillon*, *Farren*; *Queen Eleanor*, *Mrs. Hopkins*.

† The dramatic criticism of our newspapers at that time was as inferior to what it has since been, as the engravings of the same period are inferior to those plates which so exquisitely adorn several modern publications.

for the sake of *Constance* alone. "King John" had not been revived for several years ; and, with Mr. Boaden's leave, it is not credible that Kemble was in the least comparable to Garrick in the dreadful death-scene of the tyrant. Accordingly, the main weight of resuscitating the popularity of the play fell on Mrs. Siddons ; a task which she ultimately, though possibly not all at once, accomplished. At the same time, I cannot help suspecting that there was even thus early an evil agency at work in the press against her professional fame, not unconnected with that which soon afterward attacked her personal character.

Be that as it may, she was ere long regarded as so consummate in the part of *Constance*, that it was not unusual for spectators to leave the house when her part in the tragedy of "King John" was over, as if they could no longer enjoy Shakespeare himself when she ceased to be his interpreter. I could speak as a wonder-struck witness to her power in the character, with almost as many circumstantial recollections of her as there are speeches in the part. I see her in my mind's eye, the embodied image of maternal love and intrepidity ; of wronged and righteous feeling ; of proud grief and majestic desolation. With what unutterable tenderness was her brow bent over her *pretty Arthur* at one moment, and in the next how nobly drawn back, in a look at her enemies that dignified her vituperation. When she patted *Lewis* on the breast, with the words "Thine honour !—oh, thine honour !" there was a sublimity in the laugh of her sarcasm. I could point out the passages where her vicissitudes of hurried and deliberate gesture would have made you imagine that her very body seemed to think. Her elocution varied its tones from the height of vehemence to the lowest despondency, with an eagle-like power of stooping and soaring, and with the rapidity of thought. But there is a drawback in the pleasure of these recollections, from their being so little communicable to others ; and, besides, in attempting to do them justice, I am detaining the reader from more interesting matter which Mrs. Siddon's has left me in her *Memoranda*, namely, her own remarks on the character of *Constance*.

"My idea of *Constance*," she says, "is that of a lofty and proud spirit, associated with the most exquisite feelings of maternal tenderness, which is, in truth, the predominant feature of this interesting personage. The sentiments which she expresses, in the dialogue between herself, the *King of France*, and the *Duke of Austria*, at the commencement of the second

act of this tragedy, very strongly evince the amiable traits of a humane disposition, and of a grateful heart.

'Oh ! take his mother's thanks—a widow's thanks !  
Till your strong hand shall help to give him strength  
To make a more requital to your love.'

"Again, in reply to the *King's* bloody determination of subjugating the city of Angiers to the sovereignty of her son, she says,

'Stay for an answer to your embassy,  
Lest, unadvise'd, you stain your swords with blood.  
My Lord Chatillon may from England bring  
That right in peace which here we urge in war;  
And then we shall regret each drop of blood  
That hot rash haste so indiscreetly shed.'

"The idea one naturally adopts of her qualities and appearance are, that she is noble in mind, and commanding in person and demeanour ; that her countenance was capable of all the varieties of grand and tender expression, often agonized, though never distorted by the vehemence of her agitations. Her voice, too, must have been '*propertied like the tuned spheres*,' obedient to all the softest inflections of maternal love, to all the pathos of the most exquisite sensibility, to the sudden burst of heart-rending sorrow, and to the terrifying imprecations of indignant majesty, when writhing under the miseries inflicted on her by her dastardly oppressors and treacherous allies. The actress whose lot it is to personate this great character should be richly endowed by nature for its various requirements ; yet, even when thus fortunately gifted, much, very much remains to be effected by herself ; for in the performance of the part of *Constance* great difficulties, both mental and physical, present themselves. And perhaps the greatest of the former class is that of imperiously holding the mind reined-in to the immediate perception of those calamitous circumstances which take place during the course of her sadly eventful history. The necessity for this severe abstraction will sufficiently appear, when we remember that all those calamitous events occur while she herself is absent from the stage ; so that this power is indispensable for that reason alone, were there no other to be assigned for it. Because, if the representative of *Constance* shall ever forget, even behind the scenes, those disastrous events which impel her to break forth into the overwhelming effusions of wounded friendship, disappointed ambition, and

maternal tenderness, upon the first moment of her appearance in the third act, when stunned with terrible surprise she exclaims,—

‘Gone to be married—gone to swear a peace !  
False blood to false blood joined—gone to be friends !’

—if, I say, the mind of the actress for one moment wanders from these distressing events, she must inevitably fall short of that high and glorious colouring which is indispensable to the painting of this magnificent portrait.

“The quality of abstraction has always appeared to me so necessary in the art of acting, that I shall probably, in the course of these remarks, be thought too frequently and pertinaciously to advert to it. I am now, however, going to give a proof of its usefulness in the character under our consideration ; and I wish my opinion were of sufficient weight to impress the importance of this power on the minds of all candidates for dramatic fame. Here, then, is one example, among many others which I could adduce. Whenever I was called upon to personate the character of *Constance*, I never, from the beginning of the play to the end of my part in it, once suffered my dressing-room door to be closed, in order that my attention might be constantly fixed on those distressing events which, by this means, I could plainly hear going on upon the stage, the terrible effects of which progress were to be represented by me. Moreover, I never omitted to place myself, with *Arthur* in my hand, to hear the march, when, upon the reconciliation of England and France, they enter the gates of Angiers to ratify the contract of marriage between the *Dauphin* and the *Lady Blanche* ; because the sickening sounds of that march would usually cause the bitter tears of rage, disappointment, betrayed confidence, baffled ambition, and, above all, the agonizing feelings of maternal affection to gush into my eyes. In short, the spirit of the whole drama took possession of my mind and frame, by my attention being incessantly riveted to the passing scenes. Thus did I avail myself of every possible assistance, for there was need of all in this most arduous effort ; and I have no doubt that the observance of such circumstances, however irrelevant they may appear upon a cursory view, was powerfully aidant in the representations of those expressions of passion in the remainder of this scene, which have been only in part considered, and to the conclusion of which I now proceed.

“Goaded and stung by the treachery of her faithless friends, and almost maddened by the injuries they have heaped upon

her, she becomes desperate and ferocious as a hunted tigress in defence of her young, and it seems that existence itself must nearly issue forth with the utterance of that frantic and appalling exclamation—

‘A wicked day, and not a holy day !  
 What hath this day deserved ? what hath it done,  
 That it in golden letters should be set  
 Among the high tides in the calendar ?  
 Nay, rather turn this day out of the week—  
 This day of shame, oppression, perjury :  
 Or, if it must stand still, let wives with child  
 Pray that their burthens may not fall this day,  
 Lest that their hopes prodigiously be cross'd—\*  
 But on this day let seamen fear no wreck,  
 This day all things begun come to ill end !  
 Yes, faith itself to hollow falsehood change.’

“When King Philip says to her

‘By heaven ! Lady, you shall have no cause  
 To curse the fair proceedings of this day ;  
 Have I not pawn'd to you my majesty—’

what countenance, what voice, what gesture, shall realize the scorn and indignation of her reply to the heartless King of France ?—

‘You have beguil'd me with a counterfeit  
 Resembling majesty, which, being touch'd and tried,  
 Proves valueless : you are forsworn—forsworn,  
 You came in arms to spill mine enemies' blood,  
 But now in arms you strengthen it with yours,’ &c.

“And then the awful, trembling solemnity, the utter helplessness of that soul-subduing, scriptural, and prophetic invocation—

‘Arm, arm, ye heavens ! against these perjur'd kings !  
 A widow cries—Be husband to me, heavens !  
 Let not the hours of this ungodly day  
 Wear out the day in peace—but ere sun set  
 Set armed discord 'twixt these perjur'd kings.’

“If it ever were, or ever shall be, portrayed with its appropriate and solemn energy, it must be then, and then only, when the power I have so much insisted on, co-operating also with a high degree of enthusiasm, shall have transfused the mind of

\* Lest they bring forth prodigies or monsters.  
 † “But” here means except.

the actress into the person and situation of the august and afflicted *Constance*. The difficulty, too, of representing with tempered rage and dignified contempt the biting sarcasm of the following speeches to *Austria*, may be more easily imagined than explained :

‘ War ! war ! no peace—peace is to me a war—  
*Lymoges* ! O *Austria* ! thou dost shame  
 That bloody spoil—thou slave ! thou wretch ! thou coward !  
 Thou little valiant—great in villainy—  
 Thou ever strong upon the stronger side !  
 Thou Fortune’s champion—that dost never fight  
 But when her humorous Ladyship is by  
 To teach thee safety—thou art perjured too,  
 And sooth’st up greatness. What a fool art thou,  
 A ramping fool ; to brag, and stamp, and swear  
 Upon my party—thou cold-blooded slave !  
 Hast thou not spoke, like thunder, on my side ?  
 Been sworn my soldier—bidding me depend  
 Upon thy stars, thy fortune, and thy strength ?  
 And dost thou now fall over to my foes ?  
 Thou wear a lion’s hide ! doff it for shame !  
 And hang a calf-skin on those recreant limbs !’

“ But, in truth, to beget, in these whirlwinds of the soul, such temperance as, according to the lesson of our inspired master, shall give them smoothness, is a difficulty which those only can appreciate who have made the effort.

“ I cannot, indeed, conceive, in the whole range of dramatic character, a greater difficulty than that of representing this grand creature. Brought before the audience in the plenitude of her afflictions ; oppression and falsehood having effected their destructive mark ; the full storm of adversity, in short, having fallen upon her in the interval of their absence from her sight, the effort of pouring properly forth so much passion as past events have excited in her, without any visible previous progress towards her climax of desperation, seems almost to exceed the powers of imitation. Hers is an affliction of so ‘sudden floodgate and o’erbearing nature,’ that art despairs of realizing it, and the effort is almost life-exhausting. Therefore, whether the majestic, the passionate, the tender *Constance*, has ever yet been, or ever will be, personated to the entire satisfaction of sound judgment and fine taste, I believe to be doubtful ; for I believe it to be nearly impossible.

“ I now come to the concluding scene ; and I believe I shall not be thought singular when I assert, that though she has been designated the ambitious *Constance*, she has been ambitious only for her son. It was for him, and him alone, that she

aspired to, and struggled for, hereditary sovereignty. For example, you find that from that fatal moment when he is separated from her, not one regret for lost regal power or splendour ever escapes from her lips; no, not one idea does she from that instant utter which does not unanswerably prove that all other considerations are annihilated in the grievous recollections of motherly love. The following scene, I think, must determine that maternal tenderness is the predominant feature of her character.

*Act 3. Scene 4. Enter Constance.*

*King Philip.*

'Look, who comes here?—a grave unto a soul,  
Holding th' eternal spirit 'gainst her will,  
In the vile prison of afflicted breath:  
I pray thee, lady, go away with me.'

*Constance.*

'Lo! now I see the issue of your peace.'

*King Philip.*

'Patience, good lady! Comfort, gentle Constance!'

*Constance.*

'No, I defy all counsel and all redress.  
But that which ends all counsel, true redress!  
Death, Death—Oh, amiable, lovely Death—  
Thou odoriferous stench! sound rottenness!  
Arise forth from the couch of endless night,  
Thou hate and terror to prosperity,  
And I will kiss thy detestable bones,  
And put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows,  
And ring these fingers with thy household worms,  
And stop this gap of breath with fulsome dust,  
And be a carrion monster like thyself!  
Come, grin on me, and I will think thou smil'st,  
And buss thee as thy wife—Misery's love,  
Oh, come to me!'

*King Philip.*

'Oh, fair Affliction, peace!'

*Constance.*

'No, no, I will not, having breath to cry.  
Oh, that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth!  
Then with a passion would I shake the world,  
And rouse from sleep that fell Anatomy.'

Which cannot hear a lady's feeble voice !  
Which scorns a modern invocation.\*

*King Philip.*

'Lady ! you utter madness, and not sorrow.'

*Constance.*

'Thou art unholy to belie me so.  
I am not mad. This hair I tear is mine.  
My name is Constance—I was Geoffrey's wife.  
Young Arthur is my son—and he is lost.  
I am not mad ! I would to heaven I were !  
For then 'tis like I should forget myself.  
Oh ! if I could, what grief should I forget !  
Preach some philosophy to make me mad,  
And thou shalt be canonized cardinal !  
For being, not mad, but sensible of grief,  
My reasonable part produces reason  
How I may be delivered of these woes,  
And teaches me to kill or hang myself.  
If I were mad I should forget my son,  
Or madly think a babe of clouts were he.  
I am not mad ! too well, too well I feel  
The different plague of each calamity.'

*King Philip.*

'Bind up those tresses. Oh, what love I note  
In the fair multitude of those her hairs !  
Where but by chance a silver drop hath fallen,  
Even to that drop ten thousand wiry friends  
Do glue themselves in social grief,  
Like true, inseparable, faithful loves,  
Sticking together in calamity.'

*Constance.*

'To England, if you will.'

*King Philip.*

'Bind up your hairs.'

*Constance.*

'Yes ! that I will. And wherefore will I do it ?  
I tore them from their bonds, and cried aloud,  
Oh that these hands could so redeem my son  
As they have given these hairs their liberty !  
But now I envy at their liberty ;  
And will again commit them to their bonds,  
Because my poor child is a prisoner.  
And, father Cardinal, I have heard you say  
That we shall see and know our friends in heaven ;

\* "Modern" here means trite, or common.

If that be true, I shall see my boy again ;  
 For since the birth of Cain, the first male child,  
 There was not such a gracious creature born.  
 But now will canker sorrow cut my bud,  
 And chase the native beauty from his cheek ;  
 And he will look as hollow as a ghost,  
 As dim and meager as an ague's fit,  
 And so he'll die ; and rising so again,  
 When I shall meet him in the court of heaven  
 I shall not know him ; therefore, never, never  
 Shall I behold my pretty Arthur more.'

*Pandulph.*

'You hold too heinous a respect of grief.'

*Constance.*

'He talks to me that never had a son.'

*King Philip.*

'You are as fond of grief as of your child.'

*Constance.*

'Grief fills the room up of my absent child ;  
 Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,  
 Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,  
 Remembers me of all his gracious parts,  
 Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form ;  
 Then have I reason to be fond of grief.—  
 Fare you well !—had you such a loss as I,  
 I could give better comfort than you do.  
 I will not keep this form upon my head [*tears off her headdress.*  
 When there is such disorder in my wit.  
 Oh Lord ! my boy ! my Arthur ! my fair son,  
 My life, my joy, my food, my all the world !  
 My widow's comfort, and my sorrow's care !'

"Her gorgeous affliction, if such an expression is allowable, is of so sublime and so intense a character, that the personation of its grandeur, with the utterance of its rapid and astonishing eloquence, almost overwhelms the mind that meditates its realization, and utterly exhausts the frame which endeavours to express its agitations."

In spite of all these difficulties in the part of *Constance*, Mrs. Siddons must have been conscious that she had strengthened her reputation by performing it, and it is difficult henceforward to imagine her fearful of attempting any other great character in the drama. I therefore very much doubt the justice of Mr. Boaden's remark, when, after noticing that she selected the part of *Lady Randolph* for her first benefit this season, De-

ember 22, 1783,\* he adds, that “*perhaps the most serious moment of her professional life was that in which she resolved to contest even that character with her rival, Mrs. Crawford.*” I cannot conceive what there was to render the trial so terrific. The passion of one of *Constance’s* speeches would leaven the whole part of *Lady Randolph*. Mrs. Crawford’s *Lady Randolph* had undoubtedly been once a great performance; but I have already noticed, that from the first night of her reappearance at Covent Garden, after an absence of five years, the general opinion regarded her as a broken-down actress. The tragedy of “*Douglas*” was got up for Mrs. Crawford’s reappearance, on the 13th November, 1783, and Mrs. Siddons did not perform *Lady Randolph* at Drury Lane till more than a month afterward, so that she had plenty of time to rally her courage. Indeed, when we contemplate Mrs. Siddons in the blaze of her beauty, competing with this toil and age-worn rival, it is almost cruel to exult in her victory. Mrs. Siddons omitted Mrs. Crawford’s scream in the far-famed question, “*Was he alive?*” but she gave the character its appropriate beauty, and made the tragedy itself more permanently popular.

The only other new characters which she acted during her second season were the *Countess of Salisbury*, in a tragedy of that name, and *Sigismunda*, in Thomson’s “*Tancred and Sigismunda*.” In neither of those pieces could she be said to be worthily employed. The “*Countess of Salisbury*” had first appeared some thirty years before, on the Dublin stage, where the popularity of Barry and Mrs. Dancer, afterward Mrs. Barry, supported it. Small as its merit was, its real author, Hall Hartson, was accused of having had it from his college tutor, Dr. Leland, the translator of Demosthenes: the charge against Hartson, of purloining this tragedy, was as unfounded as the claim of the piece to popularity. The *Morning Chronicle* for March 8, 1784, says, “The performance of the *Countess of Salisbury*, by Mrs. Siddons, turned out but an unhappy experiment, the play being so infamously underwritten, that even her great acting could not keep it from ridicule; and when Smith came on the stage to give it out for a second representation, he was saluted with a horse-laugh.”

While acting in “*Tancred*” for her second benefit, April 24th,† she was at least adorning the drama of an acknowledged poet, and that which is generally thought the most successful

\* Cast of parts: *Douglas*, Brereton; *Norval*, Bensley; *Glenalvon*, Palmer; *Lord Randolph*, Farren.

† *Tancred*, Kemble; *Sifredi*, Bensley; *Osmond*, Farren.

of Thomson's plays. We are told\* that Garrick was very great in *Tancred*, and that Mrs. Cibber was harmony itself in *Sigismunda*. Mrs. Siddons, in the opinion of those who remembered her great predecessor in the part, fell nothing short of her in the eloquence of her eye and gesture, and she made the death of *Sigismunda* tenderly perfect. Yet in spite of this assurance, and of all my reverence for the poet of the Seasons, and the Castle of Indolence, I cannot imagine the powers of our actress invoked to the sphere where they ought to have moved in this verbose tragedy. The spell of Thomson's enchantment seems to be broken the moment he enters on the drama; he had cultivated his genius into a rich, soft soil, too luxuriant for dramatic poetry. The main issue of the plot of "Tancred" depends on the father of *Sigismunda*, *Siffredi*, whose inconsistency is enough to spoil a better tragedy. At first, the old chancellor of Sicily is all self-denial and conscientiousness, the *beau ideal* of political morality. So far so good; but he turns out an inhuman father, a false guardian, and a legal swindler. He has taken Prince *Tancred* into his house, and after causing his attachment to his daughter by domestication, he chooses rather to break both their hearts than his own political views for the good of Sicily. In a heated moment *Tancred* gives *Sigismunda* a *carte blanche* with his signature. The old lawyer, with a treachery unworthy of the lowest attorney, gets this paper from his daughter, and fills it up with a promise on the part of *Tancred* that he will marry *Constantia*, the daughter of his father's murderer. In poetry, the feigned description of improbable animals is as susceptible of detection as in natural history, and such a medley of morality and mischief as *Siffredi* probably never existed in nature.

Mrs. Siddons concluded her second season the 13th of May, 1784, with a sixth performance of *Belvidera*. Between the 8th of October and this last night, she acted fifty-three times, that is, allowing for the oratorios in Lent, nearly once in every three nights of the company's performance. *Isabella* and *Mrs. Beverley* were her most frequent characters.

Before the end of the season Mr. and Mrs. Siddons left their lodgings in the Strand, and took and furnished a comfortable house in Gower-street, and she now returned the visits of her friends in her own carriage.

I shall now recur to the few recollections of her life which Mrs. Siddons has left me in her own writing. My last quota-

\* Murphy's Life of Garrick.

tion from them ended with her description of her reception in *Isabella*. As her Memoranda are resumed at that point, they necessarily refer to some circumstances belonging to the history of her first season. But as she almost immediately passes into recollections of her second season, and as I wished to break upon the continuity of her Memoranda as little as possible, I postponed what I now quote from them to the end of my account of her professional appearances in 1783-4.

## CHAPTER VI.

**Mrs. Siddons's Memoranda—Her Summer Excursion to Edinburgh and Dublin—Important Quotation from Lee Lewes's Memoirs.**

“I CANNOT now remember the regular succession of my various characters during this my first season, 1782-3. I think *Belvidera* came soon after *Isabella*, who almost precluded the appearance of all others for a very long time ; but I well remember my fears and ready tears on each subsequent effort, lest I should fall from my high exaltation. The crowds collected about my carriage, at my outgoings and incomings, and the gratifying and sometimes comical remarks I heard on those occasions were extremely diverting. The royal family very frequently honoured me with their presence.\* The king was often moved to tears, and the queen at one time told me, in her gracious manner and broken English, that her only refuge was actually turning her back upon the stage, at the same time protesting that my acting was ‘indeed too disagreeable.’ In short, all went on most prosperously ; and, to complete my triumph, I had the honour to receive the commands of their majesties to go and read to them, which I frequently did, both at Buckingham-house and at Windsor. Their majesties were the most gratifying of auditors, because the most unremittingly attentive. The king was a most judicious and tasteful critic both in acting and dramatic composition. He told me he had

\* As early as the January of 1783, the royal family began to patronise Mrs. Siddons, and they continued to see her in all her characters : her *Euphrasia* ; her *Belvidera* ; her *Jane Shore* ; her *Calista* ; and her *Isabella* ; and even the offensive politics of the manager, Sheridan, vanished before the charms of the new sovereign of the stage.

endeavoured, vainly, to detect me in a false emphasis, and very humorously repeated many of Mr. Smith's, who was then a principal actor. He graciously recommended the propriety of my action, particularly my total repose in certain situations. This, he said, is a quality in which Garrick failed. '*He never could stand still—he was a great fidget.*'

"I do not exactly remember the time," she continues, "that I was favoured with an invitation from Dr. Johnson, but I think it was during the first year of my celebrity.\* The doctor was then a wretched invalid, and had requested my friend Mr. Windham to persuade me to favour him by drinking tea with him, in Bolt Court. \* \* \* \* The doctor spoke highly of Garrick's various powers of acting. When Mr. Windham and myself were discussing some point respecting Garrick, he said, 'Madam, do not trouble yourself to convince Windham; he is the very bull-dog of argument, and will never loose his hold.' Dr. Johnson's favourite female character in Shakspeare was *Katharine*, in 'Henry VIII.' He was most desirous of seeing me in that play: but said, 'I am too deaf and too blind to see or hear at a greater distance than the stage-box, and have little taste for making myself a public gaze, in so distinguished a situation.' I assured him that nothing would gratify me so much as to have him for an auditor, and that I could procure for him an easy-chair at the stage-door, where he would both see and hear, and be perfectly concealed. He appeared greatly pleased with this arrangement, but, unhappily for me, he did not live to fulfil our mutual wishes. Some weeks before he died I made him some morning visits. He was extremely, though formally, polite; always apologized for being unable to attend me to my carriage; conducted me to the head of the stairs, kissed my hand, and bowing, said, 'Dear madam, I am your most humble servant;' and these were always repeated without the smallest variation.

"About this time occurred a memorable evening, which is accurately described in Cumberland's *Observer*. I was invited into this snare by Miss Monkton (since Lady Cork). This lady had given me her word of honour that I should meet only half a dozen of our mutual friends; for I had often told her very seriously, that it suited neither my studies nor my inclinations to be engaged in parties, from which I begged most

\* Mrs. Siddons is pretty nearly right in her recollection. Her introduction to Dr. Johnson took place about a year after her return to Drury Lane, namely, in October, 1783, at the commencement of her second season.

earnestly to be excused ; for, to say the truth, I had been forewarned how eagerly any notorious person was pursued for exhibition. Miss Monkton solemnly promised me to keep her word, and assured me that I need never fear meeting a crowd at her house. The appointed Sunday evening came. I went to her very much in undress at the early hour of eight, on account of my little boy, whom she desired me to bring with me, more for effect, I suspect, than for his *beaux yeux*. I found with her, as I had been taught to expect, three or four ladies of my acquaintance ; and the time passed in agreeable conversation, till I had remained much longer than I had apprehended. I was of course preparing speedily to return home, when incessantly repeated thunderings at the door, and the sudden influx of such a throng of people as I had never before seen collected in any private house, counteracted every attempt that I could make for escape. I was therefore obliged, in a state of indescribable mortification, to sit quietly down, till I know not what hour in the morning ; but for hours before my departure, the room I sat in was so painfully crowded, that the people absolutely stood on the chairs, round the walls, that they might look over their neighbours' heads to stare at me ; and if it had not been for the benevolent politeness of Mr. Erskine, who had been acquainted with my arrangement, I know not what weakness I might have been surprised into, especially being tormented, as I was, by the ridiculous interrogations of some learned ladies, who were called *Blues*, the meaning of which title I did not at that time appreciate, much less did I comprehend the meaning of the greater part of their learned talk. These profound ladies, however, furnished much amusement to the town for many weeks after, nay, I believe I might say for the whole winter. Glad enough was I at length to find myself at peace in my own bed-chamber.

"I was, as I have confessed, an ambitious candidate for fame, and my professional avocations alone, independently of domestic arrangements, were of course incompatible with habitual observance of parties and concerts, &c. I therefore often declined the honour of such invitations. As much of time as could now be stolen from imperative affairs was employed in sitting for various pictures. I had frequently the honour of dining with Sir Joshua Reynolds, in Leicester-square. At his house were assembled all the good, the wise, the talented, the rank and fashion of the age. About this time he produced his picture of me in the character of the Tragic Muse. In justice to his genius, I cannot but remark his instantaneous decision

of the attitude and expression of the picture. It was, in fact, decided within the twinkling of an eye. When I attended him for the first sitting, after more gratifying encomiums than I can now repeat, he took me by the hand, saying '*Ascend your undisputed throne, and graciously bestow upon me some good idea of the Tragic Muse.*' I walked up the steps, and instantly seated myself in the attitude in which the *Tragic Muse* now appears. This idea satisfied him so well, that without one moment's hesitation he determined not to alter it. When I attended him for the last sitting, he seemed to be afraid of touching the picture; and, after pausingly contemplating his work, he said, 'No, I will merely add a little more colour to the face.' I then begged him to pardon my presumption in hoping that he would not heighten that tone of complexion so deeply accordant with the chilly and concentrated musings of pale melancholy. He most graciously complied with my petition; and, some time afterward, when he invited me to go and see the picture finished, and in the frame, he did me the honour to thank me for persuading him to pause from heightening the colour, being now perfectly convinced that it would have impaired the effect: adding, that he had been inexpressibly gratified by observing many persons strongly affected in contemplating this favourite effort of his pencil. I was delighted when he assured me that he was certain the colours would remain unfaded as long as the canvass would keep them together, which, unhappily, has not been the case with all his works: he gallantly added, with his own benevolent smile, 'And, to confirm my opinion, here is my name; for I have resolved to go down to posterity on the hem of your garment.' Accordingly, it appears upon the border of the drapery. Here ended our interview; and shortly afterward, his precious life.\* Her gracious majesty very soon procured my dear little boy admittance to the Charter-house; and the king, who had been told that I used white paint (which I always detest), sent me, by my friend Sir Charles Hotham, a condescending message, to warn me against its pernicious effects. I cannot imagine how I could be suspected of this disgusting practice.

"Sir Joshua often honoured me by his presence at the theatre. He approved very much of my costumes, and of my hair without powder, which at that time was used in great profusion, with a reddish-brown tint, and a great quantity of po-

\* Mrs. Siddons is a little mistaken. Sir Joshua lived several years longer. The portrait was exhibited in 1784. Sir Joshua died in 1792.

matum, which, well kneaded together, modelled the fair ladies' tresses into large curls like demi-cannon. My locks were generally braided into a small compass, so as to ascertain the size and shape of my head, which, to a painter's eye, was of course an agreeable departure from the mode. My short waist, too, was to him a pleasing contrast to the long stiff stays and hoop petticoats which were then the fashion, even on the stage, and it obtained his unqualified approbation. He always sat in the orchestra ; and in that place were to be seen, O glorious constellation ! Burke, Gibbon, Sheridan, Windham, and, though last, not least, the illustrious Fox, of whom it was frequently said, that iron tears were drawn down Pluto's gloomy cheeks. And these great men would often visit my dressing-room, after the play, to make their bows, and honour me with their applauses. I must repeat, O glorious days ! Neither did his royal highness the Prince of Wales withhold this testimony of his approbation.

"Garrick's conduct towards me was by these gentlemen attributed to jealousy ; and Mr. G. A. Stevens was heard to say, in reference to the clamorous applause of my first night, 'If Garrick could hear this, it would turn him upon his face in his coffin.' This expression, though a compliment to myself, I take to be as unjust as it was shocking. For my own part, I never could give credit to such a notion ; for it is utterly inconceivable that he should have seen any thing in an untaught, unpractised girl to excite such a feeling ; and, as I have already observed, I really think it was merely for the pleasure of mortifying others that he distinguished me. Cruel, cruel pleasure !

"My door was soon beset by various persons quite unknown to me, whose curiosity was on the alert to see the new actress, some of whom actually forced their way into my drawing-room, in spite of remonstrance or opposition. This was as inconvenient as it was offensive ; for, as I usually acted three times a week, and had, besides, to attend the rehearsals, I had but little time to spend unnecessarily. One morning, though I had previously given orders not to be interrupted, my servant entered the room in a great hurry, saying, 'Ma'am, I am very sorry to tell you there are some ladies below, who say they must see you, and it is impossible for me to prevent it. I have told them over and over again that you are particularly engaged, but all in vain ; and now, ma'am, you may actually hear them on the stairs.' I felt extremely indignant at such unparalleled impertinence ; and before the servant had done speaking to me, a tall, elegant, invalid-looking person presented herself

(whom, I am afraid, I did not receive very graciously), and after her four more, in slow succession. A very awkward silence took place; when presently the first lady began to accost me, with a most inveterate Scotch twang, and in a dialect which was scarcely intelligible to me in those days. She was a person of very high rank: her curiosity, however, had been too powerful for her good-breeding. 'You must think it strange,' said she, 'to see a person entirely unknown to you intrude in this manner upon your privacy; but you must know, I am in a very delicate state of health, and my physician won't let me go to the theatre to see you, so I am to look at you here.' She accordingly sat down to look, and I to be looked at, for a few painful moments, when she arose and apologized; but I was in no humour to overlook such insolence, and so let her depart in silence.

"I had very soon the honour of reading to their majesties, in Buckingham House, and it occurred frequently.\* One could not appear in the presence of the queen except in a dress not elsewhere worn, called a *sack* or *negligée*, with a hoop, treble ruffles, and lappets, in which costume I felt not at all at my ease. When I arrived at Buckingham House, I was conducted into an ante-chamber, where I found some ladies of my acquaintance; and, in a short time, the king entered from the drawing-room, in the amiable occupation of drawing the Princess Amelia, then scarce three years old, in a little cane chair. He graciously said something to one of the ladies, and left the lovely baby to run about the room. She happened to be much pleased with some flowers in my bosom, and, as I stooped down that she might take them, if so disposed, I could not help exclaiming to a lady near me, 'What a beautiful child!—how I long to kiss her!' when she instantly held her little hand to my mouth to be kissed: so early had she learned this lesson of royalty. Her majesty was extremely gracious, and more than once during the reading desired me to take some refreshment in the next room. I declined the honour, however, though I had stood reading till I was ready to drop, rather than run the risk of falling down by walking backwards out of the room (a ceremony not to be dispensed with), the flooring, too, being rubbed bright. I afterward learned from one of the ladies who was present at the time, that her majesty had expressed her-

\* She was this year appointed preceptress in English reading to the princesses. The appointment exacted no farther employment than these occasional readings; but I believe it was without emolument.

self surprised to find me so collected in so new a position, and that I had conducted myself as if I had been used to a court. At any rate, I had frequently personated queens.

“Afterward I had the honour of attending their majesties at Windsor also. The readings there were arranged in the apartments of my dear and honoured friend Lady Harcourt, whom I had lately seen as the hostess of Nuneham, doing the honours of her splendid mansion, when the king and queen and several of the younger branches of the royal family came, while I was on a visit there. They were so delighted with their loyal and noble host and hostess, and so charmed with all they saw, that their attendants were sent back to Windsor for what was necessary for three days, and even then they were loath to depart. One may imagine the usual style of magnificence in which they lived, from the circumstance that they were but little deranged by the unexpected arrival even of royal guests.”

During the summer recess of 1784, Mrs. Siddons visited Edinburgh, and acted eleven times, to the delight of her Scottish audiences. Her reception in Scotland was worthy of a land already enlightened by philosophy and the Muses, and in which the very lowest class were now so far emerged from the old fanaticism, that we shall soon find them crowding in multitudes around the great actress’s hotel, in their enthusiasm to see her.

What a pleasing contrast is here presented to the gloomy temper of the Scotch, with regard to stage entertainments, that had exhibited itself in times not long gone by. Only seventeen years were elapsed since the date of an admonition and exhortation by the reverend Presbytery of Edinburgh, to all within their bounds, declaring themselves at this time loudly called upon, *in one body and with one voice, to expostulate, in the bowels of love and compassion*, against the encouragement given to the play-house, and denouncing the sin of seeing a play with as much awful solemnity as if they had been denouncing the crime of murder. Well-meaning as those mistaken kirkmen might be, it is disgusting to see them garnishing this medley of cant and ignorance with the holy and beautiful language of Scripture. They blindly asserted that the Christian church had been at all times hostile to the stage, forgetting, or not knowing, that stage-entertainments had sprung out of the church itself; and, with equal falsehood, implying that there was no Christian church in the days of Shakspeare. There were sermons printed by Scottish divines within the

eighteenth century, representing the play-house as the actual temple of the Devil, where he frequently appeared, clothed in a corporeal substance, and possessing the spectators, whom he held as his worshippers.\* The spirit of this *Odium Theatricum* seems scarcely to have abated when the above admonition was penned; and it was followed by the punishment of John Home, for writing the only good tragedy ever written by a Scotsman. Assuredly, Edinburgh at that period had a right to the name of the Modern Athens, from one point of resemblance to the ancient city of Minerva. In Athens the priests *persecuted Aeschylus*, and in Edinburgh the clergy *prosecuted* the author of "Douglas."

The people of Glasgow were but a year later than those of Edinburgh in welcoming our great actress to their city, but they were so far from being behind them in enthusiasm, that they presented her with a massive piece of plate, with an inscription, purporting that they sent it as a proof of their being able to appreciate theatrical genius as well as the people of Edinburgh. They also came in great numbers to Edinburgh during this first year of Mrs. Siddons's appearance in Scotland, and augmented the pressure of those crowded audiences which made it a service of danger to attend her performances. The over-heated houses which she drew occasioned illness to many individuals, and the medical faculty of Edinburgh owed her a token of their regard more immediately than the lawyers, for their practice was increased by a prevalent indisposition, which got the name of the Siddons fever.

In the progress of Scottish liberality, however, I cannot compliment my fellow-citizens of Glasgow on having at all had the start of their eastern neighbours. On the contrary, my worthy townsmen, in the days of their imagined godliness, showed more practically than the people of Edinburgh how well they could appreciate theatrical genius, by badgering and burning out the unfortunate histrions. The cause of the destruction of the first play-house that was ever erected in Glasgow was a voice from the pulpit. The ground of that edifice was purchased by the proprietors from a malt-merchant of the city. In bargaining for the sale of it, the man of malt expressed to the purchasers his horror at the idea of disposing of his land

\* Little more than a hundred years ago, my Scottish countrymen had such an abhorrence of all carnal recreations, that they denounced dancing itself as the sin of "*louping against the Lord!*" and when a public ball-room was instituted at Edinburgh, the giddy rabble came and perforated the doors with red-hot spits.

to be occupied by a temple of Belial ; and, for this devout consideration, he could not in conscience part with it for a smaller price than five shillings the square yard. His demand, though enormous for those days, was complied with, and the temple of Belial forthwith uprose. But before it could be acted in, a fanatical preacher, who was popular in Glasgow, told his auditors that he dreamed, the preceding night, he was in the infernal regions, at a grand entertainment, where all the devils were present, when Lucifer, their chief, gave for a toast, the health of Maister John Miller, maltster, in Glasgow, who had sold them his ground to build a house upon, which was to be opened the next day, and wherein they were all to reign. The preacher's hearers hastened away in a body to the new theatre, and consumed it with fire.\* Some years later, in 1757, the Presbytery of Glasgow responded with due solemnity to the admonition of their Edinburgh brethren, which I have quoted above. They echoed its owlish hootings at the innocent amusements of the stage. They blasphemously condemned, as ministers of God, what the gospel has nowhere reprehended. They attributed the then existing war to our manifold sins, one of which was permitting theatres ; and, with a true feeling of Scotch economy, they described the dearth of provisions as one of the surest tokens of Divine displeasure against a play-going generation.

Trifling circumstances, like straws showing the direction of the wind, are often sure tests of popular opinion. Among the veriest vulgar of Scotland Mrs. Siddons had now her devoted worshippers. A poor serving-girl, with a basket of greens on her arm, one day stopped near her, in the High-street of Edinburgh, and, hearing her speak, said, " Ah ! weel do I ken that sweet voice, that made me greet sae sair the streen." The poet Gray, on seeing a copy of Thomson's Seasons in a blacksmith's shop, exclaimed, " This is true popularity !" And the remark might have been equally applied to Mrs. Siddons's humble admirer.

In recording this visit to Edinburgh, Mrs. Siddons says, " How shall I express my gratitude for the honours and kindness of my northern friends ?—for, should I attempt it, I should be thought the very queen of egotists. But never can I forget the private no less than public marks of their gratifying suffrages. There I became acquainted with the venerable author of ' Douglas,' with Dr. Blair, David Hume, Dr. Beattie, Mr.

\* This was in 1746.

Mackenzie, &c., and passed with them a succession of fleeting days, which never failed to instruct and delight me.

"On the first night of my appearance, I must own, I was surprised, and not a little mortified, at that profound silence which was a contrast to the bursts of applause I had been accustomed to hear in London. No; not a hand moved till the end of the scene: but then, indeed, I was most amply remunerated. Yet, while I admire the fine taste and judgment of this conduct on the part of an audience, I am free to confess that it renders the task of an actor almost too laborious; because, customary interruptions are not only gratifying and cheering, but they are really necessary, in order to give one breath and voice to carry one on through some violent exertions; though, after all, it must be owned that silence is the most flattering applause an actor can receive."

How much more pleasantly people tell their history in social converse than in formal writing. I remember Mrs. Siddons describing to me the same scene of her probation on the Edinburgh boards with no small humour. The grave attention of my Scottish countrymen, and their *canny* reservation of praise till they were sure she deserved it, she said, had well-nigh worn out her patience. She had been used to speak to animated clay; but she now felt as if she had been speaking to stones. Successive flashes of her elocution, that had always been sure to electrify the south, fell in vain on those northern flints. At last, as I well remember, she told me she coiled up her powers to the most emphatic possible utterance of one passage, having previously vowed in her heart, that if *this* could not touch the Scotch, she would never again cross the Tweed. When it was finished, she paused, and looked to the audience. The deep silence was broken only by a single voice exclaiming, "*That's no bad!*" This ludicrous parsimony of praise convulsed the Edinburgh audience with laughter. But the laugh was followed by such thunders of applause, that amid her stunned and nervous agitation she was not without fears of the galleries coming down.

"I took my leave," she continues, "of dear Edinburgh, and proceeded to fulfil an engagement at Dublin. After a rough voyage, we were put on shore in the middle of the night, and were obliged, sick and weary as we were, to wander about the streets for about two hours before we could find a resting-place; for, strange to tell, they would not at that period receive a woman at any hotel. Of this, of course, we had been quite ignorant. We found our way, however, to my brother John's

lodgings, who took compassion on the helpless wanderers, and sheltered us till we were accommodated, which was very soon effected by my charming friend Mrs. O'Neil, the late Miss Boyle.

"This visit to Ireland answered all my expectations both of profit and pleasure. I was received by all the first families there with the most flattering hospitality ; and the days I passed with them will be ever remembered as among the most pleasurable of my life. The Duke of Rutland, however, the then lord-lieutenant, was very unpopular ; and upon one occasion, when I acted *Lady Randolph* at his command, the public displeasure against him was so excessively clamorous that not one word of the play was heard from beginning to end : and I had the honour of participating in the abuse with the representative of majesty.

"The manager of the theatre also very soon began to adopt every means of vexation for me that he could possibly devise, merely because I chose to suggest, at rehearsal, that his proper situation, as *Falconbridge*, in 'King John,' was at the right hand of the king. During the scene between *Constance* and *Austria*, he thought it necessary that he should, though he did it most ungraciously, adopt this arrangement ; but his malevolence pursued me unremittingly from that moment. He absurdly fancied that he was of less consequence when placed at so great a distance from the front of the stage, at the ends of which the kings were seated ; but he had little or nothing to say, and his being in the front would have greatly interrupted and diminished the effect of *Constance's* best scene. He was a very handsome man, and, I believe, was mortified that his personal attractions had failed to pervert my judgment in the grouping of this scene. He made me suffer, however, sufficiently for my personality, by employing all the newspapers to abuse and annoy me the whole time I remained in Dublin, and to pursue me to England with malignant scandal : but of that anon. The theatre, meantime, was attended to his heart's content ; indeed, the whole of this engagement was as profitable as my most sanguine hopes could have anticipated.

"When it was ended I made a visit to Shane's Castle, the magnificent residence of Mr. and Mrs. O'Neil. I have not words to describe the beauty and splendour of this enchanting place ; which, I am sorry to say, has been since levelled to the earth by a tremendous fire. Here were often assembled all the talent, and rank, and beauty of Ireland. Among the persons of the Leinster family whom I met here was poor

Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the most amiable, honourable, though misguided, youth I ever knew. The luxury of this establishment almost inspired the recollections of an Arabian Night's entertainment. Six or eight carriages, with a numerous throng of lords and ladies on horseback, began the day, by making excursions around this terrestrial paradise, returning home just in time to dress for dinner. The table was served with a profusion and elegance to which I have never seen any thing comparable. The sideboards were decorated with adequate magnificence, on which appeared several immense silver flagons, containing claret. A fine band of musicians played during the whole of the repast. They were stationed in the corridors, which led into a fine conservatory, where we plucked our dessert from numerous trees of the most exquisite fruits. The foot of the conservatory was washed by the waves of a superb lake, from which the cool and pleasant wind came, to murmur in concert with the harmony from the corridor. The graces of the presiding genius, the lovely mistress of the mansion, seemed to blend with the whole scene.

“ When my visit to Shane's Castle was over, I entered into another engagement in Dublin. Among the actors in that theatre was Mr. Digges, who had formerly held a high rank in the drama, but who was now, by age and infirmity, reduced to a subordinate and mortifying situation. It occurred to me that I might be of some use to him, if I could persuade the manager to give him a night, and the actors to perform for him, at the close of my engagement; but when I proposed my request to the manager, he told me it could not be, because the whole company would be obliged to leave the Dublin theatre, in order to open the theatre at Limerick; but that he would lend the house for my purpose, if I could procure a sufficient number of actors to perform a play. By indefatigable labour, and in spite of cruel annoyances, Mr. Siddons and myself got together, from all the little country theatres, as many as would enable us to attempt ‘ *Venice Preserved*. ’ Oh! to be sure, it was a scene of disgust and confusion. I acted *Belvidera*, without having ever previously seen the face of one of the actors; for there was no time for even one rehearsal; but the motive procured us indulgence. Poor Mr. Digges was most materially benefited by this most ludicrous performance; and I put my disgust into my pocket, since money passed into his. Thus ended my Irish engagement; but not so my persecution by the manager, at whose instance the newspapers were filled with the most unjust and malignant reflections on

me. All the time I was on a visit of some length to the dowager Duchess of Leinster, unconscious of the gathering storm, while the public mind was imbibing poisonous prejudices against me. Alas ! for those who subsist by the stability of public favour."

I subjoin an extract from the *Memoirs of Lee Lewes*, in which he bears a manly and distinct testimony to the unblameableness of Mrs. Siddons's conduct in this whole affair.

"There, at Dublin (he says), I am enabled, as I was in the kingdom, and know every particular, gathered partly from inquiries, and partly from observation, to throw some light upon as dark a transaction as was ever practised against innocence and merit. I mean that infamous combination carried on against Mrs. Siddons, which raised that opposition she soon afterward met in Drury Lane theatre, 1785, to the disgrace of that part of the audience who were deceived into it ; who were but few, after all, in comparison with her friends who opposed them, and who, on the second night, silenced them entirely.

"In the summer of 1783, Mrs. Siddons was engaged by Mr. Daly, the manager, to perform a certain number of nights in Dublin,—I believe twelve. Her terms were half the receipts, the charges of the theatre being first deducted, which charges were called sixty pounds. At the latter end of June she began her career, which was as brilliant here as in London. At the conclusion, she very much wished to perform for the benefit of the Marshalsea Prison ; but, being pressed for time by her engagements at Cork, and hoping to have that opportunity another season, she sent a sum of money to the conductors of the above prison, and had the thanks of the debtors, as well as an acknowledgment from the managers, in the public papers ; though, by her own wish, the thanks, though full, were not ostentatiously expressed. Thus ended her first season at Dublin.

"In the summer of 1784 she engaged herself for twenty nights, at a certain sum each night. The theatre was again crowded, and all things went on prosperously till about the middle of the engagement, when she was unfortunately seized with a violent fever, which confined her to her bed for a fortnight. This accident began to arouse the venal tribe against our heroine ; and rumours were spread that her illness was put on for some improper purpose. She recovered, however, and went on with her engagement. And now we come to the principal incident which introduced the injured lady into this

part of my memoirs. As she was rehearsing the part of *Belvidera*, one morning, Digges, as he was standing for the part of *Pierre*, suddenly sank down. It was no less than a paralytic stroke, which deprived him of the use of one side. He was taken from the theatre, and, I believe, never returned to where he had fretted and strutted so many hours. Mrs. Siddons's engagement was coming to a conclusion; and she was advertised for Cork a few days after. In the mean time, a person came to her, and told her that it would be a charitable action if she would perform in a benefit play for poor Digges. Her answer was, that she was sorry she had but one night to spare, and for that she thought she was engaged in honour to play for the Marshalsea prisoners, as she had intended, in the year before. This, to be sure, was a denial to Digges, though not an uncharitable refusal; and yet, what an artful and fiend-like use was made of it!—as will appear. The messenger had not been long gone, when it struck her that it would be more humane to assist this old unfortunate; and immediately she despatched a person to Drumcondra, where Digges then was, to say that Mrs. Siddons had reconsidered the matter, and would be glad to perform for him. He was thankful, and the night and play were fixed. There was a good house. The next day, while preparing for her journey for Cork, she received a note from Digges, expressing his gratitude. It will be proper to inform my reader, that while she was at Dublin, there was a little sparring between her and the manager. At Cork, the misunderstanding was renewed, and I there made my own observations. These little bickerings brought down many paragraphs upon her from the party; and, directly after, a paper war ensued. She was accused of having charged Digges fifty pounds for playing at his benefit. A very artful letter, written by a Mr. F——y, upon that subject, appeared in a morning print; and, as it was inserted with a more mischievous intent than any of the rest, so it had a greater effect. It was now predicted that she was to be driven from the London stage whenever she should appear on it; and, among the rest, appeared a paragraph, calling on any of her profession to come forth, and say if she had ever done a kind action. This was rather an unlucky challenge; for, a few weeks before, even in the city of York, it was a fact, that she had performed three times without any emolument to herself; once for my benefit; once for that of Mr. Aickin, of Covent Garden; and once for the benefit of a poor-house. I should have thought myself base indeed to have remained

neutral at such a time ; and I immediately published this circumstance in several of the morning prints. Should not Mr. Digges have done the same ? But, though called upon, and urged by many of Mrs. Siddons's friends, he, for reasons best known to himself, kept an obstinate silence, and even suffered a rumour to prevail that she had taken money from him. But, at last, being closely pressed, he sent a letter, in which he owned that she had played for him gratis. He died soon after ; and peace be to his manes ! Mrs. Siddons appeared on the London boards ; and though this confession of her having performed gratis was made public, there were persons determined not to believe it, and who absolutely insulted her ; but, as I have said before, they were but few in comparison of her powerful and numerous friends, and the vipers were soon crushed."

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## CHAPTER VII.

Mrs. Siddons's own Account of her being affronted in the Theatre—Public Opinion is disabused, and she recovers her Popularity—Appears as *Margaret of Anjou*, in Franklin's "Earl of Warwick"—Character of the Piece—Her next new Part is *Zara*, in the Tragedy translated by Aaron Hill, from Voltaire's "Zaire"—Napoleon's Opinion of Voltaire as a dramatic Poet—Mrs. Siddons plays the *Lady of St. Vallori*, in Cumberland's "Carmelite"—Comparison of that Tragedy with Home's "Douglas"—John Kemble adapts Massinger's "Maid of Honour" for the modern Stage, and Mrs. Siddons acts *Camiola*—Remarks on the "Maid of Honour."

THE falsehoods that were now in circulation respecting our great actress, she seems herself to attribute to the enmity of the Dublin manager : but the plot that was evidently forming against her must have had several partakers, and the rumour of the day said, that it included some members of her own profession, whose envy sickened in the shade that her superior merit threw over them. It would be unfair, at this distance of time, to quote names on mere suspicion. The only person who was clearly convicted of calumny was the wife of Digges ; but she was a poor, insignificant creature, who could not be supposed capable of envying Mrs. Siddons. Brereton the actor was but too justly condemned for having seen Mrs. Siddons publicly insulted on his account, before he published his tea-

timony "that she had been in no respect the occasion of his having missed a benefit in Ireland; but, on the contrary, that he owed her the highest obligations of friendship." The calamitous alienation of Brereton's mind that took place not long subsequent, inclines me to judge of his actions at this period with some allowance. That there was, however, a regular conspiracy, got up to insult her, in London, was made but too plain by the sequel; and it is only to be regretted that its unknown agents had not been branded with shame in the flagrancy of their guilt. It must be owned, that the artificers of calumny had a difficult object of attack in Mrs. Siddons. Against her character, as a wife and mother, scandal itself could not whisper a surmise; and it was equally hopeless to impugn her genius as an actress. But they spread abroad that she was avaricious, uncharitable, and slow to lend her professional aid to unfortunate fellow-players. Two specific charges alone of this kind could be alleged, and they were both met and refuted by the clearest demonstration. Digges testified that she had performed for him, as an act of charity, in Ireland. His miserable wife could only say for herself, that she had believed the misstatement to which she had given currency; and Brereton made the declaration which I have quoted.

"I had left London," says Mrs. Siddons, in her *Memoranda*, "the object of universal approbation; but, on my return, only a few weeks afterward, I was received, on my first night's appearance, with universal opprobrium,—accused of hardness of heart, and total insensibility to every thing and everybody except my own interest. Unhappily, contrary winds had for some days precluded the possibility of receiving from Dublin such letters as would have refuted those atrocious calumnies, and saved me from the horrors of this dreadful night, when I was received with hissing and hooting, and stood the object of public scorn. Amid this afflicting clamour I made several attempts to be heard, when at length a gentleman stood forth in the middle of the front of the pit, impelled by benevolent and gentlemanly feeling, who, as I advanced to make my last attempt at being heard, accosted me in these words: 'For heaven's sake, madam, do not degrade yourself by an apology, for there is nothing necessary to be said.' I shall always look back with gratitude to this gallant man's solitary advocacy of my cause: like '*Abdiel, faithful found; among the faithless, faithful only he.*' His admonition was followed by reiterated clamour, when my dear brother appeared, and carried me away from this scene of insult. The instant I quitted it, I

fainted in his arms ; and, on my recovery, I was thankful that my persecutors had not had the gratification of beholding this weakness. After I was tolerably restored to myself, I was induced, by the persuasions of my husband, my brother, and Mr. Sheridan, to present myself again before that audience by whom I had been so savagely treated, and before whom, but in consideration of my children, I would have never appeared again. The play was the 'Gamester,' which commences with a scene between *Beverley* and *Charlotte*. Great and pleasant was my astonishment to find myself, on the second rising of the curtain, received with a silence so profound that I was absolutely awe-struck, and never yet have I been able to account for this surprising contrast ; for I really think that the falling of a pin might have been then heard upon the stage."

On Mrs. Siddons's second entrance this night, she addressed the audience in these words : "Ladies and gentlemen,—The kind and flattering partiality which I have uniformly experienced in this place, would make the present interruption distressing to me indeed, were I, in the slightest degree, conscious of having deserved your censure. I feel no such consciousness. The stories which have been circulated against me are calumnies : when they shall be proved to be true, my aspersioners will be justified. But, till then, my respect for the public leads me to be confident, that I shall be protected from unmerited insult."

"The accusations which had been brought against me," she continues, "were pride, insolence, and savage insensibility to the distresses of my theatrical associates ; and, as I have observed already, even the winds and waves combined to overwhelm me with obloquy ; for many days elapsed before I could possibly receive from Dublin those letters which, when they did arrive and were published, carried conviction to the public mind. The most cruel of these aspersions accused me of having inhumanly refused, at first, to act for the benefit of poor Mr. Digges, and of having at last agreed to do so upon terms so exorbitant as had never before been heard of. A letter from himself, however, full of grateful acknowledgments, sufficed to clear me from the charge, by testifying that, so far from having deserved it, I had myself arranged the affair with the manager, and had acted *Belvidera* under the most annoying and difficult circumstances.

"Here ended my disgrace and persecution ; and from that time forth the *generous public*, during the remainder of the season, received my *entrée* each succeeding night with shouts,

huzzas, and waving of handkerchiefs, which, however gratifying as testimonials of their changed opinion, were not sufficient to obliterate from my memory the tortures I had endured from their injustice, and the consciousness of a humiliating vocation."

I believe that, in spite of preponderating applause, her *entrée*, for several evenings afterward, was met with attempts to insult her. She made her reverence, and went on steadily with her part: but her manner was for a time perceptibly damped; and she declared to one of her friends, that, for many a day after this insult, all her professional joy and ambition drooped in her mind, and she sickened at the thought of being an actress.

On the 3d of November, 1784, she appeared, for the first time, in Franklin's tragedy of the "Earl of Warwick," as a heroine distinguished in English history, namely, *Margaret of Anjou*.\*

This play, by Franklin, was an unavowed translation of La Harpe's *Comte de Warwick*; in which the *French author*, says Mr. Boaden, *had the mortification to see the tender interest of his piece frittered away*. For the translator's concealment of his original, I have no apology to offer; but, of the alleged tender interest of that original, I confess myself unable to perceive a trace: and Mr. Boaden, I conceive, is as much mistaken in eulogizing the French tragedy as in confounding its author with the Colonel La Harpe who was tutor to the Emperor of Russia. The Gallic poet, with equal defiance of nature and history, represents the beautiful *Lady Elizabeth Woodville* as enamoured of the old iron-sheathed *Earl of Warwick*, and refusing *King Edward's* hand from her preference of the graybeard. He also makes *Margaret of Anjou* assassinate with her own hand the *Earl of Warwick*. This is rather too bad; as every schoolboy in England may be supposed to know, that Edward the Fourth made a romantic love-marriage with *Lady Elizabeth Woodville*; that Warwick was old enough to be the father of the said Elizabeth; and that the tough old king-maker died fighting in the cause of Queen Margaret.

Indifferent as the French play may be, however, I grant that the English translator has not made it better: and no information that I have ever received respecting Mrs. Siddons ever struck me with so much surprise as to learn, from unquestionable authority, that she made an imposing and electrifying

\* *Earl of Warwick*, Smith; *King Edward*, Palmer; *Lady Elizabeth Grey*, Miss Kemble; *Margaret of Anjou*, Mrs. Siddons.

stage part out of *Margaret of Anjou*. I could conceive her having been impressive in the so-called Shakspeare's *Queen Margaret* of "Henry the Sixth :" though it is doubtful if Shakspeare wrote much in that tragedy ; but her dignifying La Harpe's and Franklin's heroine, as I never saw her perform the part, appeared to me unimaginable. If it should convict me, however, of being a false critic on the written play, I am bound to confess the fact, as it is attested to me by others, that Mrs. Siddons made it interesting in representation. Mrs. Bartley told me that "her superb disdain, as the captive queen, dwelt strongly in her recollection ; and that when she informed *Elizabeth* that her *Warwick* had not *an hour* to live, her disyllabic pronunciation of the word *hour* was so powerful that it still seemed to vibrate in her ears."

Mr. Bartley, when I wrote to consult him on the subject, had the goodness to favour me with the following note :

"I despair of being able to convey any idea of the wonders which Mrs. Siddons wrought in 'The Earl of Warwick ;' for wonders they may be called, as I agree with you that it is a very indifferent tragedy. But especially I feel the difficulty of giving you any idea of that indelible impression which she made upon me, as *Margaret of Anjou*, in the last act of the piece. The performance I allude to must have occurred either in 1809 or 1810, at least twenty-four years ago ; and yet, to my imagination, she stands before me at this instant.

"On that occasion I happened to personate the character of *King Edward the Fourth*, who, in the scene referred to, learns that *Warwick* has taken *Margaret* and her son captives, and is momentarily expecting the triumphant appearance of *Warwick*. He does not know (nor does the audience) that *Margaret* had taken advantage of an unguarded moment to approach and stab *Warwick* as he stood in triumph over her son. Instead of *Warwick*, therefore, *Margaret* enters : and the skilful management made by this great performer to produce her effect was the following. The scene had a large archway, in the centre, at the back of the stage. She was preceded by four guards, who advanced rapidly through the archway and divided, two and two on each side, leaving the opening quite clear. Instantly, on their separating, the giantess burst upon the view, and stood in the centre of the arch motionless. So electrifying was the unexpected impression, that I stood for a moment breathless. But the effect extended beyond me : the audience had full participation of its power ; and the continued applauses

that followed gave me time to recover and speculate upon the manner in which such an extraordinary effort had been made. I could not but gaze upon her attentively. Her head was erect, and the fire of her brilliant eyes darted directly upon mine. Her wrists were bound with chains, which hung suspended from her arms, that were dropped loosely on each side; nor had she, on her entrance, used any action beyond her *rapid walk* and *sudden stop*, within the extensive archway, which she really *seemed to fill*. This, with the flashing eye, and fine smile of appalling triumph which overspread her magnificent features, constituted all the effort which usually produced an effect upon actors and audience never surpassed, if ever equalled.

“I am, dear sir, &c.

“G. W. BARTLEY.”

Her next new character was *Zara*, in the tragedy so named, which Aaron Hill translated from the “*Zaire*” of Voltaire. She appeared in it on the 7th of November, 1784.\* I find, from the contemporary prints, that high expectations were entertained respecting Mrs. Siddons in this part: for tradition still told of Mrs. Cibber’s brilliant performance of it. It should, however, have been remembered also, that the latter actress had Garrick to assist her, whose magic acting, as *Lusignan*, I suspect, gave the main spell of popularity to this tragedy on its first appearance. The part of *Zara*, whatever impression our great actress made in it, certainly never became one of her favourites, nor has the play been ever revived since that season at Drury Lane.

In justice to Voltaire’s “*Zaire*,” it must be owned, that the young *Orosmane* and the old crusader *Lusignan* are in some degree imposing personages. But it is altogether a frigid production. Indifferent as the *Grecian Daughter* is, I think she is a better heroine than Voltaire’s; for *Euphrasia* is a main agent in the drama to which she belongs, while *Zaire* is shut up from action; and, while other personages engross a paramount attention, she has only to suffer and declaim.

The French themselves seem now to appreciate Voltaire pretty soberly as a dramatic poet. Even La Harpe, after extolling “*Zaire*” for alleged beauties, such as might be found in the commonest melo-drama, lets out that, in his own days,

\* *Osman*, Smith; *Lusignan*, Bensley; *Nerestan*, Brereton; *Chatillon*, J. Aickin; *Zara*, Mrs. Siddons.

it was scarcely ever acted in Paris. This circumstance he attributes to the want of such actors as Le Kain and Mlle. Gauzin ; of the latter of whom it was eloquently said, that "there were tears in her voice ;" a fine expression to be sure, but which will not clench La Harpe's conclusion as to the sole cause of the "Zaire's" infrequent representation. Voltaire's general fame as a man of talents, and as a stormer of prejudices in their strongest holds, justly rests undiminished ; but his glory as a tragic writer is as justly on the wane.\*

On the 2d of December (1784), Cumberland's tragedy of the "Carmelite" gave Mrs. Siddons a new character, in the *Lady of St. Vallori*.† The piece was well received, and deservedly, for it is respectable, though not superlative, nor, in my opinion, perfectly original. I will not indeed go so far as to say that Cumberland borrowed his subject from Home, but he treads close enough upon "Douglas" to show that *that* tragedy had given him strong suggestions. In both stories, a mother has for twenty years lamented the husband of her youth ;—in "Douglas" a real, in the "Carmelite" an imaginary, death. And each of the mothers has a son, to whom the demonstration of her maternal love is misconstrued, and brings or threatens tragic results. To Home's heroine the mistake is fatal, while Cumberland's plot is wound up agreeably to our wishes, and *Hildebrand*, the counterpart to *Glenalvon*, alone perishes. The scene of *Hildebrand's* death, by-the-way, has considerable power, and contains one memorable poetical passage. When the supposed murderer of her husband speaks of mercy to *Matilda*, she replies to him,

" Mercy !—and dare thy tongue pronounce the name ?  
 Mercy !—thou man of blood, thou hast destroy'd it.  
 It came from heaven to save *St. Vallori*.  
 You saw the cherub messenger-alight  
 From its descent : with outspread wings it sat  
 Covering his breast : yeu drew your cursed steel,  
 And through the pleading angel pierc'd his heart !"

\* Nothing, in Napoleon's personal history is more interesting than his quick-sightedness in literature. In one of his conversations at St. Helena, after dismissing Voltaire's miserable conception of Mahomet's character with deserved contempt, he said, "It is astonishing how ill all his dramas are adapted for reading. When criticism and sound taste are not cheated by pompous diction and scenic illusion, they immediately lose a thousand per cent."

† *St. Vallori*, Smith ; *Montgomeri*, Kemble ; *Lord Hildebrand*, Palmer ; *Lord De Courci*, J. Aickin ; *Gifford* (an old servant), Packer ; *Matilda* (the *Lady of St. Vallori*), Mrs. Siddons. It was acted thirteen times.

The interest, both of "Douglas" and the "Carmelite," lies principally in maternal affection,—that deep source of pathos, by appealing to which Euripides has been more indebted than to any other circumstance for his share in the trine supremacy of Greek dramatic poetry. But Cumberland's mother, it is hardly necessary to say, is an incomparably less interesting being than *Lady Randolph*. The *Matilda* of the "Carmelite" has indeed never lost her son; but, for no discoverable reason, she educates him as her page, without revealing to him the secret of his parentage in all the years during which she falsely imagines her husband dead. With equal absurdity she sends out this unavowed son as her champion, though he has never couched a lance at tilt or tournament. In one respect, and in one alone, the author of "St. Vallori" can compete with the author of "Douglas,"—to wit, in showing more knowledge of Norman castles and of the times of chivalry. Home was probably not profound in Scottish antiquities; but, if he had been so, prudence would have cautioned him not to awaken popish reminiscences among the Scotch. He derives, however, a picturesqueness from nature beyond the charm of antiquarian knowledge, and worth a hundred Norman castles.

Cumberland's *Matilda*, in the "Carmelite," owns herself to be a little deranged in her intellects by grief. This was rather unreasonable; as, though she had lost her youthful husband, she still retained her son. But *Lady Randolph*'s delirium is perfectly natural; and, in concluding the tragedy with her suicide, it was fortunate that Home merged the Scottish priest in the daring poet.

Amid this modern poverty of the national drama, John Kemble proposed turning back upon its ancient resources. He was much better acquainted than most of his contemporaries with our elder play-writers; and, among them, he particularly admired Massinger, who, with less rich sensibility than some of the nearest successors of Shakspeare, has perhaps more dignity and judgment. Kemble retouched this poet's tragedy of "Camiola, or the Maid of Honour," so as to adapt it to the modern stage, and to produce Mrs. Siddons in the part of its heroine.

Dr. Ireland ranks the "Maid of Honour" in the higher order of Massinger's dramas. With deference to so good a critic, I should hardly conceive this tragedy to be one that has principally refreshed the old poet's laurels; at least, it is not one that I should cite in proof of his judgment. *Bertoldo*, the lover of the *Maid of Honour*, is a disappointing hero. He is the

natural brother of the *King of Sicily*, a knight of Malta, invested at the outset with every attribute that can make us in love with chivalry, and “*with high thoughts seated in a heart of honour.*” He wooes *Camiola*, and wins a confession of her affection; but she cannot consent to wed him, because he is bound to celibacy by the oath of his order, though her refusal is prefaced by praises of the warmest eloquence.

“ Truth bear witness for me,  
 That in the judgment of my soul you are  
 A man so absolute and circular  
 In all those wish’d-for rarities that may take  
 A virgin captive; that, though at this instant  
 All sceptred monarchs of our Western world  
 Were rivals with you, and *Camiola* worthy  
 Of such a competition, you alone  
 Should wear the garland.”

When *Bertoldo* answers her objection of his being bound to a single life, by saying,

“ A dispensation, lady,  
 Will easily absolve me :”

she replies,

“ O ! take heed, sir !  
 When what is vow’d to heaven is dispense’d with,  
 To serve our ends on earth, a curse must follow,  
 And not a blessing.”

*Bertoldo* embarks at the head of a warlike adventure, is overwhelmed by numbers, captured, and chained in a dungeon. When the news of his fate is brought to Sicily, the *King* refuses to ransom him: but *Camiola*, sacrificing half her fortune, sends a friend with the price of his release. This friend of hers, *Adorni*, is also her lover, but unaccepted, and hopelessly devoted to her. She gives him the cruel commission of ransoming his rival; and (still worse) of exacting from him an oath to marry her in return for his ransom,—so much had the *Maid of Honour* changed her mind as to the curse that must follow a dispensation.

When poor *Adorni*, to show that he loves *Camiola* better than himself, has fulfilled this commission, and sworn-in *Bertoldo*, the knight of Malta is brought to the court of *Aurelia*, Duchess of Siena, whose troops had defeated him. She falls in love with him, and, after short hesitation, and a too unexampled lapse of character, all the principles, nay, common feelings of

honour, honesty, and gratitude in *Bertoldo*, fall down like a house of cards, and the recreant pledges himself to marry *Aurelia*; nay, even accompanies her to Sicily, where he is sure to meet with the *Maid of Honour*. The whole ends in *Aurelia* giving him up, in *Camiola* devoting herself to a nunnery, and in the precious knight reswearing to keep his vows as a bachelor.

*Bertoldo's* metamorphosis is not dramatic. But are we not disappointed, it may possibly be asked, by daily mutations of human character in real life: and may these not be pictured in the drama? Yes; but they should be pictured with probability. In real life we know men's hearts but imperfectly, and may be utterly unable to account for their changes; but the poet makes the hearts and natures of his personages; and if he will transmute them from good to bad, he ought to prepare us, by some natural prognostic, for the change. All that is noble in *Bertoldo* disappears like a phantom; and he forfeits our esteem like a detected cheat, who ought never to have possessed it.

Kemble, whatever he thought of *Bertoldo*, could not well alter his character in remodelling Massinger's play. But he removed two other defects from the piece, about which there can be no question, namely, certain gross speeches, and an entire foolish character wholly unnecessary to the plot. *Sylli*, a creature fatuous with self-conceit, is brought constantly by Massinger into the same scene with *Camiola*, and spoils the dignity of her impression by our disgust at her endurance of his presence. Kemble threw this idiot overboard; and he is a character of most agreeable absence. The old dramatists, all but their chief, seldom fail more egregiously than in their efforts to create jest-makers. They exhibit foolish fellows indeed, but not the arch fools of Shakspeare, who alone knew how to dip their motley coats in the hues of immortality.

The joint powers of Mrs. Siddons and her brother prolonged the reception of this play only for three nights.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Siddons acts *Lady Macbeth*—Her own Remarks on the Character.

No performer was destined oftener than Mrs. Siddons to expend superlative genius on the acting of indifferent dramas. It is true that she sometimes turned this misfortune into the means of creating additional astonishment. Where there was little or no poetry, she made it for herself; and might be said to have become at once both the dramatist and the actress. Where but a hint of a fine situation was given, she caught up the vague conception, and produced it in a shape that was at once ample and defined; and, with the sorriest text to justify the outpouring of her own radiant and fervid spirit, she turned into a glowing picture what she had found but a comparative blank.

Much, however, as we may wonder at this high degree of theatrical art, I doubt if its practice would be desirable, as a general advantage, either to the actor's profession or to dramatic poetry. Actors, in parts beneath their powers, are, after all, only like musicians performing on instruments unworthy of their skill. They overcome us, it is true, with wonder and delight. I have heard the inspired Neukomme draw magical sounds from a common parish-church organ, which, under any other touch than his own, was about as musical as the bell overhead that summoned the parishioners. But this did not prevent me from devoutly wishing that I had heard him perform on the Haarlem organ.

The stage-artist's inspiration ought never to depend on shining by its own light: for it never can be perfect, unless it meets and kindles with the correspondent inspiration of poetry. The temporary triumph which this marvellous acting affords to indifferent plays is unjust to the truly poetical drama, and perplexing to popular taste. Mrs. Siddons's *Margaret of Anjou*, for instance, I dare say, persuaded half her spectators that Franklin's "Earl of Warwick" was a noble poem. The reading man, who had seen the piece at night adorned by her acting, would, no doubt, next morning, on perusal, find that her performance alone had given splendour to the meteor: but the

unreading spectator would probably for ever consider "The Earl of Warwick" a tragedy as good as any of Shakspeare's.

The most pleasing points, therefore, in Mrs. Siddons's history, are her returns to the plays of Shakspeare. She chose the part of *Lady Macbeth* for her second benefit this season, February 2, 1785.\*

I regard the tragedy of "Macbeth," upon the whole, as the greatest treasure of our dramatic literature. We may look, as Britons, at Greek sculpture and Italian paintings, with a humble consciousness that our native art has never reached their perfection; but, in the drama, we can confront Æschylus himself with Shakspeare: and, of all modern theatres, *ours* alone can compete with the Greek in the unborrowed nativeness and sublimity of its superstition. In the grandeur of tragedy, "Macbeth" has no parallel, till we go back to the "Prometheus and the Furies" of the Attic stage. I could even produce, if it were not digressing too far from my subject, innumerable instances of striking similarity between the metaphorical mintage of Shakspeare's and of Æschylus's style,—a similarity, both in beauty and in the fault of excess, that, unless the contrary had been proved, would lead me to suspect our great dramatist to have been a studious Greek scholar. But their resemblance arose only from the consanguinity of nature.

In one respect, the tragedy of "Macbeth" always reminds me of Æschylus's poetry. It has scenes and conceptions absolutely too bold for representation. What stage could do justice to Æschylus, when the Titan Prometheus makes his appeal to the elements; and when the hammer is heard in the Scythian Desert that rivets his chains? Or when the ghost of Clytemnestra rushes into Apollo's temple, and rouses the sleeping Furies? I wish to imagine these scenes: I should be sorry to see the acting of them attempted.

In like manner, there are parts of "Macbeth" which I delight to read much more than to see in the theatre. When the drum of the Scottish army is heard on the wild heath, and when I fancy it advancing, with its bowmen in front, and its spears and banners in the distance, I am always disappointed with *Macbeth's* entrance, at the head of a few kilted actors. Perhaps more effect might be given to this scene by stage pre-

\* Cast of the other parts in the performance of "Macbeth," Feb. 2, 1785. *Macbeth*, Smith; *Macduff*, Brereton; *Banquo*, Benaley; *Witches*, Parsons, Moody, and Baddely.

paration ; though with the science of stage-effect I can pretend to little acquaintance. But, be that as it may, I strongly suspect that the appearance of the *Weird Sisters* is too wild and poetical for the possibility of its being ever duly acted in a theatre. Even with the exquisite music of Lock, the orgies of the *Witches* at their boiling caldron is a burlesque and revolting exhibition. Could any stage contrivance make it seem sublime ? No ! I think it defies theatrical art to render it half so welcome as when we read it by the *mere* light of our own imaginations. Nevertheless, I feel no inconsistency in reverting from these remarks to my first assertion, that, all in all, "Macbeth" is our greatest possession in dramatic poetry. With the exception of the *Weird Sisters*, it is not only admirably suited for stage representation, but it has given the widest scope to the greatest powers of British acting. It was restored to our theatre by Garrick, with much fewer alterations than have generally mutilated the plays of Shakspeare. For two-thirds of a century before Garrick's time, "Macbeth" had been worse than banished from the stage : for it had been acted with D'Avenant's alterations, produced in 1672, in which every original beauty was either awkwardly disguised or arbitrarily omitted. Yet, so ignorant were Englishmen, that "The Tatler" quotes Shakspeare's "Macbeth" from D'Avenant's alteration of it ; and when Quin heard of Garrick's intention to restore the original, he asked, with astonishment, "Have I not all this time been acting Shakspeare's play ?"

*Lady Macbeth*, though not so intensely impassioned as *Constance*, is a more important character in the tragedy to which she belongs. She is a larger occupant of our interest on the stage, and a more full and finished poetical creation. The part accordingly proved, as might have been expected, Mrs. Siddons's master-piece. It was an era in one's life to have seen her in it. She was Tragedy personified.

Mrs. Siddons has left, in her Memoranda, the following

*"Remarks on the Character of Lady Macbeth."*

"In this astonishing creature one sees a woman in whose bosom the passion of ambition has almost obliterated all the characteristics of human nature ; in whose composition are associated all the subjugating powers of intellect, and all the charms and graces of personal beauty. You will probably not agree with me as to the character of that beauty ; yet, perhaps, this difference of opinion will be entirely attributable to the difficulty of your imagination disengaging itself from that idea

of the person of her representative which you have been so long accustomed to contemplate. According to my notion, it is of that character which I believe is generally allowed to be most captivating to the other sex,—fair, feminine, nay, perhaps even fragile—

‘Fair as the forms that, wove in Fancy’s loom,  
    Float in light visions round the poet’s head.’

Such a combination only, respectable in energy and strength of mind, and captivating in feminine loveliness, could have composed a charm of such potency as to fascinate the mind of a hero so dauntless, a character so amiable, so honourable as *Macbeth*,—to seduce him to brave all the dangers of the present and all the terrors of a future world; and we are constrained, even while we abhor his crimes, to pity the infatuated victim of such a thraldom. His letters, which have informed her of the predictions of those preternatural beings who accosted him on the heath, have lighted up into daring and desperate determinations all those pernicious slumbering fires which the enemy of man is ever watchful to awaken in the bosoms of his unwary victims. To his direful suggestions she is so far from offering the least opposition, as not only to yield up her soul to them, but moreover to invoke the sightless ministers of remorseless cruelty to extinguish in her breast all those compunctions visitings of nature which otherwise might have been mercifully interposed to counteract, and perhaps eventually to overcome, their unholy instigations. But having impiously delivered herself up to the excitements of hell, the pitifulness of heaven itself is withdrawn from her, and she is abandoned to the guidance of the demons whom she has invoked.

“Here I cannot resist a little digression, to observe how sweetly contrasted with the conduct of this splendid fiend is that of the noble, single-minded *Banquo*. He, when under the same species of temptation, having been alarmed, as it appears, by some wicked suggestions of the *Weird Sisters* in his last night’s dream, puts up an earnest prayer to heaven to have these cursed thoughts restrained in him, ‘*which nature gives way to in repose.*’ Yes, even as to that time when he is not accountable either for their access or continuance, he remembers the precept, ‘*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*’

“To return to the subject. *Lady Macbeth*, thus adorned with every fascination of mind and person, enters for the first time, reading a part of one of those portentous letters from

her husband. ‘They met me in the day of success; and I have learned by the perfectest report they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burned with desire to question them further, they made themselves into thin air, into which they vanished. While I stood wrapped in the wonder of it, came missives from the king, who all hailed me ‘Thane of Cawdor,’ by which title, before these sisters had saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time with ‘*Hail, king that shall be!*’ This I have thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.’ Now vaulting ambition and intrepid daring rekindle in a moment all the splendours of her dark blue eyes. She fatally resolves that *Glamis* and *Cawdor* shall be also that which the mysterious agents of the Evil One have promised. She then proceeds to the investigation of her husband’s character.

‘ Yet I do fear thy nature,  
 It is too full of the milk of human kindness  
 To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,  
 Art not without ambition, but without  
 The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,  
 That thou wouldst holily. Wouldst not play false,  
 And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou’dst have great *Glamis*,  
 That which cries, *Thus thou must do if thou have it!*  
 And that which rather thou dost fear to do  
 Than wishest should be undone.’

“In this development, we find that, though ambitious, he is yet amiable, conscientious, nay, pious; and yet of a temper so irresolute and fluctuating as to require all the efforts, all the excitement which her uncontrollable spirit and her unbounded influence over him can perform. She continues—

‘ Hie thee hither,  
 That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,  
 And chastise with the valour of my tongue  
 All that impedes thee from the golden round,  
 Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
 To have thee crown’d withal.’

“ Shortly *Macbeth* appears. He announces the king’s approach; and she, insensible it should seem to all the perils which he has encountered in battle, and to all the happiness of his safe return to her,—for not one kind word of greeting or congratulation does she offer,—is so entirely swallowed up

by the horrible design, which has probably been suggested to her by his letters, as to have entirely forgotten both the one and the other. It is very remarkable that *Macbeth* is frequent in expressions of tenderness to his wife, while she never betrays one symptom of affection towards him, till, in the fiery furnace of affliction, her iron heart is melted down to softness. For the present, she flies to welcome the venerable gracious *Duncan*, with such a show of eagerness as if allegiance in her bosom sat crowned with devotion and gratitude.

“ *The Second Act.*

“ There can be no doubt that *Macbeth*, in the first instance, suggested his design of assassinating the king, and it is probable that he has invited his gracious sovereign to his castle, in order the more speedily and expeditiously to realize those thoughts, ‘ *whose murder, though but yet fantastical, so shook his single state of man.*’ Yet, on the arrival of the amiable monarch who had so honoured him of late, his naturally benevolent and good feelings resume their wonted power. He then solemnly communes with his heart, and after much powerful reasoning upon the danger of the undertaking, calling to mind that *Duncan* his king, of the mildest virtues, and his kinsman, lay as his guest. All those accumulated determents, with the violated rights of sacred hospitality bringing up the rear, rising all at once in terrible array to his awakened conscience, he relinquishes the atrocious purpose, and wisely determines to proceed no farther in the business. But, now, behold his evil genius, his grave-charm, appears, and by the force of her revilings, her contemptuous taunts, and, above all, by her opprobrious aspersion of cowardice, chases the gathering drops of humanity from his eyes, and drives before her impetuous and destructive career all those kindly charities, those impressions of loyalty, and pity, and gratitude, which, but the moment before, had taken full possession of his mind. She says,

‘ I have given suck, and know  
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.  
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
 Have pluck'd my nipple from its boneless gums,  
 And dash'd the brains out,—had I but so sworn  
 As you have done to this.’

“ Even here, horrific as she is, she shows herself made by ambition, but not by nature, a perfectly savage creature. The very use of such a tender allusion in the midst of her dreadful

language, persuades one unequivocally that she has really felt the maternal yearnings of a mother towards her babe, and that she considered this action the most enormous that ever required the strength of human nerves for its perpetration. Her language to *Macbeth* is the most potently eloquent that guilt could use. It is only in soliloquy that she invokes the powers of hell to unsex her. To her husband she avows, and the naturalness of her language makes us believe her, that she had felt the instinct of filial as well as maternal love. But she makes her very virtues the means of a taunt to her lord;—‘ You have the milk of human kindness in your heart,’ she says (in substance) to him, ‘ but ambition, which is my ruling passion, would be also yours if you had courage. With a hankering desire to suppress, if you could, all your weaknesses of sympathy, you are too cowardly to will the deed, and can only dare to wish it. You speak of sympathies and feelings. I too have felt with a tenderness which your sex cannot know; but I am resolute in my ambition to trample on all that obstructs my way to a crown. Look to me, and be ashamed of your weakness.’ Abashed, perhaps, to find his own courage humbled before this unimaginable instance of female fortitude, he at last screws up his courage to the sticking-place, and binds up each corporal agent to this terrible feat. It is the dead of night. The gracious *Duncan*, now shut up in measureless content, reposes sweetly, while the restless spirit of wickedness resolves that he shall wake no more. The daring fiend, whose pernicious potions have stupefied his attendants, and who even laid their daggers ready,—her own spirit, as it seems, exalted by the power of wine,—proceeds, ‘ That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold,’ now enters the gallery, in eager expectation of the results of her diabolical diligence. In the tremendous suspense of these moments, while she recollects her habitual humanity, one trait of tender feeling is expressed, ‘ Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done it.’ Her humanity vanishes, however, in the same instant; for when she observes that *Macbeth*, in the terror and confusion of his faculties, has brought the daggers from the place where they had agreed they should remain for the crimination of the grooms, she exhorts him to return with them to that place, and to smear those attendants of the sovereign with blood. He, shuddering, exclaims, ‘ I’ll go no more! I am afeard to think of what I have done. Look on’t again I dare not.’

“ Then instantaneously the solitary particle of her human feeling is swallowed up in her remorseless ambition, and

wrenching the daggers from the feeble grasp of her husband, she finishes the act which the infirm of purpose had not courage to complete, and calmly and steadily returns to her accomplice with the fiend-like boast,

‘ My hands are of your colour ;  
But I would scorn to wear a heart so white. ’

“ A knocking at the gate interrupts this terrific dialogue ; and all that now occupies her mind is urging him to wash his hands and put on his nightgown, ‘ *lest occasion call*,’ says she, ‘ *and show us to be the watchers*. ’ In a deplorable depravation of all rational knowledge, and lost to every recollection except that of his enormous guilt, she hurries him away to their own chamber.

“ *The Third Act.*

“ The golden round of royalty now crowns her brow, and royal robes enfold her form ; but the peace that passeth all understanding is lost to her for ever, and the worm that never dies already gnaws her heart.

‘ Nought’s had—all’s spent,  
Where our desire is had without content.  
‘Tis safer to be that which we destroy,  
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.’

“ Under the impression of her present wretchedness, I, from this moment, have always assumed the dejection of countenance and manners which I thought accordant to such a state of mind ; and, though the author of this sublime composition has not, it must be acknowledged, given any direction whatever to authorize this assumption, yet I venture to hope that he would not have disapproved of it. It is evident, indeed, by her conduct in the scene which succeeds the mournful soliloquy, that she is no longer the presumptuous, the determined creature that she was before the assassination of the king : for instance, on the approach of her husband, we behold for the first time striking indications of sensibility, nay, tenderness and sympathy ; and I think this conduct is nobly followed up by her during the whole of their subsequent eventful intercourse. It is evident, I think, that the sad and new experience of affliction has subdued the insolence of her pride and the violence of her will ; for she comes now to seek him out, that she may at least participate his misery. She knows, by her own woful

experience, the torment which he undergoes, and endeavours to alleviate his sufferings by the following inefficient reasonings :

‘ How now, my lord—why do you keep alone ?  
Of sorriest fancies your companions making ?  
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died  
With them they think on. Things without all remedy  
Should be without regard. What’s done, is done.’

“ Far from her former habits of reproach and contemptuous taunting, you perceive that she now listens to his complaints with sympathizing feelings ; and, so far from adding to the weight of his affliction the burthen of her own, she endeavours to conceal it from him with the most delicate and unremitting attention. But it is in vain ; as we may observe in this beautiful and mournful dialogue with the physician on the subject of his cureless malady : ‘ Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased ? &c. You now hear no more of her chidings and reproaches. No ; all her thoughts are now directed to divert his from those sorriest fancies, by turning them to the approaching banquet, in exhorting him to conciliate the good will and good thoughts of his guests, by receiving them with a disengaged air, and cordial, bright, and jovial demeanour. Yes ; smothering her sufferings in the deepest recesses of her own wretched bosom, we cannot but perceive that she devotes herself entirely to the effort of supporting him.

“ Let it be here recollected, as some palliation of her former very different deportment, that she had probably from childhood commanded all around her with a high hand ; had uninterruptedly, perhaps, in that splendid station, enjoyed all that wealth, all that nature had to bestow ; that she had, possibly, no directors, no controllers, and that in womanhood her fascinated lord had never once opposed her inclinations. But now her new-born relentings, under the rod of chastisement, prompt her to make palpable efforts in order to support the spirits of her weaker, and, I must say, more selfish husband. Yes ; in gratitude for his unbounded affection, and in commiseration of his sufferings, she suppresses the anguish of her heart, even while that anguish is precipitating her into the grave which at this moment is yawning to receive her.

“ *The Banquet.*

“ Surrounded by their court, in all the apparent ease and self-complacency of which their wretched souls are destitute, they are now seated at the royal banquet ; and although,

through the greater part of this scene, *Lady Macbeth* affects to resume her wonted domination over her husband, yet, notwithstanding all this self-control, her mind must even then be agonized by the complicated pangs of terror and remorse. For, what imagination can conceive her tremors, lest at every succeeding moment *Macbeth*, in his distraction, may confirm those suspicions, but ill concealed, under the loyal looks and cordial manners of their facile courtiers, when, with smothered terror, yet domineering indignation, she exclaims, upon his agitation at the ghost of *Banquo*, 'Are you a man?' *Macbeth* answers,

'Ay, a bold one—that dare look on that  
Which might appal the devil.'

*Lady Macbeth.*

'Oh, proper stuff!  
This is the very painting of your fear;  
This is the air-drawn dagger which, ye said,  
Led you to Duncan:—Oh, these flaws and starts,  
Impostors to true fear, would well become  
A woman's story at a winter's fire,  
Authorized by her grandam—Shame itself.  
Why do you make such faces? when all's done,  
You look but on a stool.'

"Dying with fear, yet assuming the utmost composure, she returns to her stately canopy; and, with trembling nerves, having tottered up the steps to her throne, that bad eminence, she entertains her wondering guests with frightful smiles, with over-acted attention, and with fitful graciousness; painfully, yet incessantly, labouring to divert their attention from her husband. While writhing thus under her internal agonies, her restless and terrifying glances towards *Macbeth*, in spite of all her efforts to suppress them, have thrown the whole table into amazement; and the murderer then suddenly breaks up the assembly by the following confession of his horrors:

'Can such things be,  
And overcome us like a summer cloud,  
Without our special wonder? You make me  
Even to the disposition that I am,  
When now I think you can behold such sights  
And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,  
When mine is blanched with fear.'

*Rosse.*

'What sight, my lord?'

"What imitation, in such circumstances as these, would ever satisfy the demands of expectation? The terror, the remorse, the hypocrisy of this astonishing being, flitting in frightful succession over her countenance, and actuating her agitated gestures with her varying emotions, present, perhaps, one of the greatest difficulties of the scenic art, and cause her representative no less to tremble for the suffrage of her private study than for its public effect.

"It is now the time to inform you of an idea which I have conceived of *Lady Macbeth's* character, which perhaps will appear as fanciful as that which I have adopted respecting the style of her beauty; and, in order to justify this idea, I must carry you back to the scene immediately preceding the banquet, in which you will recollect the following dialogue:

'Oh, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife;  
Thou knowest that Banquo and his Fleance live.'

*Lady Macbeth.*

'But in them Nature's copy's not eterne.'

*Macbeth.*

'There's comfort yet—they are assailable.  
Then be thou jocund; ere the bat has flown  
His cloistered flight—ere to black Hecate's summons  
The shard-born beetle, with his drowsy hums,  
Hath rung night's yawning peal—there shall be done  
A deed of dreadful note.'

*Lady Macbeth.*

'What's to be done?'

*Macbeth.*

'Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,  
Till thou applaud the deed. Come, unfeeling night,  
Scarf up the tender, pitiful eye of day,  
And with thy bloody and invisible hand  
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond  
Which keeps me pale. Light thickens, and the crow  
Makes way to the rocky wood.—  
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,  
While night's black agents to their prey do rouse.  
Thou marvelllest at my words—but hold thee still;  
Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.'

"Now, it is not possible that she should hear all these ambiguous hints about *Banquo* without being too well aware

that a sudden, lamentable fate awaits him. Yet, so far from offering any opposition to *Macbeth*'s murderous designs, she even hints, I think, at the facility, if not the expediency, of destroying both *Banquo* and his equally unoffending child, when she observes that, '*in them Nature's copy is not eterne*'. Having, therefore, now filled the measure of her crimes, I have imagined that the last appearance of *Banquo*'s ghost became no less visible to her eyes than it became to those of her husband. Yes, the spirit of the noble *Banquo* has smilingly filled up, even to overflowing, and now commends to her own lips the ingredients of her poisoned chalice.

*“The Fifth Act.*

“Behold her now, with wasted form, with wan and haggard countenance, her starry eyes glazed with the ever-burning fever of remorse, and on their lids the shadows of death. Her ever-restless spirit wanders in troubled dreams about her dismal apartment; and, whether waking or asleep, the smell of innocent blood incessantly haunts her imagination:

‘Here’s the smell of the blood still.  
All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten  
This little hand.’

“How beautifully contrasted is the exclamation with the bolder image of *Macbeth*, in expressing the same feeling!

‘Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash the blood  
Clean from this hand?’

And how appropriately either sex illustrates the same idea!

“During this appalling scene, which, to my sense, is the most so of them all, the wretched creature, in imagination, acts over again the accumulated horrors of her whole conduct. These dreadful images, accompanied with the agitations they have induced, have obviously accelerated her untimely end; for in a few moments the tidings of her death are brought to her unhappy husband. It is conjectured that she died by her own hand. Too certain it is, that she dies, and makes no sign. I have now to account to you for the weakness which I have, a few lines back, ascribed to *Macbeth*; and I am not quite without hope that the following observations will bear me out in my opinion. Please to observe, that he (I must think pusillanimously, when I compare his conduct to her forbearance) has been continually pouring out his miseries to his wife. His

heart has therefore been eased, from time to time, by unloading its weight of wo ; while she, on the contrary, has perseveringly endured in silence the uttermost anguish of a wounded spirit.

‘ The grief that does not speak  
Whispers the o’erfraught heart, and bids it break.’

“ Her feminine nature, her delicate structure, it is too evident, are soon overwhelmed by the enormous pressure of her crimes. Yet it will be granted, that she gives proofs of a naturally higher-toned mind than that of *Macbeth*. The different physical powers of the two sexes are finely delineated, in the different effects which their mutual crimes produce. Her frailer frame, and keener feelings, have now sunk under the struggle—his robust and less sensitive constitution has not only resisted it, but bears him on to deeper wickedness, and to experience the fatal fecundity of crime.

‘ For mine own good—all causes shall give way.  
I am in blood so far stepp’d in, that should I wade no more,  
Returning were as tedious as go o’er.’

Henceforth, accordingly, he perpetrates horrors to the day of his doom.

“ In one point of view, at least, this guilty pair extort from us, in spite of ourselves, a certain respect and approbation. Their grandeur of character sustains them both above recrimination (the despicable accustomed resort of vulgar minds) in adversity ; for the wretched husband, though almost impelled into this gulf of destruction by the instigations of his wife, feels no abatement of his love for her, while she, on her part, appears to have known no tenderness for him, till, with a heart bleeding at every pore, she beholds in him the miserable victim of their mutual ambition. Unlike the first frail pair in Paradise, they spent not the fruitless hours in mutual accusation.”

Mrs. Siddons had played *Lady Macbeth* in the provincial theatres many years before she attempted the character in London. Adverting to the first time this part was allotted to her, she says, “ It was my custom to study my characters at night, when all the domestic cares and business of the day were over. On the night preceding that in which I was to appear in this part for the first time, I shut myself up, as usual, when all the family were retired, and commenced my study of

*Lady Macbeth.* As the character is very short, I thought I should soon accomplish it. Being then only twenty years of age, I believed, as many others do believe, that little more was necessary than to get the words into my head ; for the necessity of discrimination, and the development of character, at that time of my life, had scarcely entered into my imagination. But to proceed. I went on with tolerable composure, in the silence of the night (a night I never can forget), till I came to the assassination scene, when the horrors of the scene rose to a degree that made it impossible for me to get farther. I snatched up my candle, and hurried out of the room, in a paroxysm of terror. My dress was of silk, and the rustling of it, as I ascended the stairs to go to bed, seemed to my panic-struck fancy like the movement of a spectre pursuing me. At last I reached my chamber, where I found my husband fast asleep. I clapped my candlestick down upon the table, without the power of putting the candle out ; and I threw myself on my bed, without daring to stay even to take off my clothes. At peep of day I rose to resume my task ; but so little did I know of my part when I appeared in it at night, that my shame and confusion cured me of procrastinating my business for the remainder of my life.

"About six years afterward I was called upon to act the same character in London. By this time I had perceived the difficulty of assuming a personage with whom no one feeling of common general nature was congenial or assistant. One's own heart could prompt one to express, with some degree of truth, the sentiments of a mother, a daughter, a wife, a lover, a sister, &c., but to adopt this character must be an effort of the judgment alone.

"Therefore it was with the utmost diffidence, nay, terror, that I undertook it, and with the additional fear of Mrs. Pritchard's reputation in it before my eyes. The dreaded first night at length arrived, when, just as I had finished my toilet, and was pondering with fearfulness my first appearance in the grand fiendish part, comes Mr. Sheridan, knocking at my door, and insisting, in spite of all my entreaties not to be interrupted at this to me tremendous moment, to be admitted. He would not be denied admittance ; for he protested he must speak to me on a circumstance which so deeply concerned my own interest, that it was of the most serious nature. Well, after much squabbling, I was compelled to admit him, that I might dismiss him the sooner, and compose myself before the play began. But, what was my distress and astonishment, when I

found that he wanted me, even at this moment of anxiety and terror, to adopt another mode of acting the sleeping scene. He told me he had heard with the greatest surprise and concern that I meant to act it without holding the candle in my hand ; and, when I urged the impracticability of washing out that '*damned spot*,' with the vehemence that was certainly implied by both her own words and by those of her gentleman, he insisted, that if I did put the candle out of my hand, it would be thought a presumptuous innovation, as Mrs. Pritchard had always retained it in hers. My mind, however, was made up, and it was then too late to make me alter it ; for it was too agitated to adopt another method. My deference for Mr. Sheridan's taste and judgment was, however, so great, that, had he proposed the alteration while it was possible for me to change my own plan, I should have yielded to his suggestion ; though, even then, it would have been against my own opinion, and my observation of the accuracy with which somnambulists perform all the acts of waking persons. The scene, of course, was acted as I had myself conceived it ; and the innovation, as Mr. Sheridan called it, was received with approbation. Mr. Sheridan himself came to me, after the play, and most ingenuously congratulated me on my obstinacy. When he was gone out of the room, I began to undress ; and, while standing up before my glass, and taking off my mantle, a diverting circumstance occurred to chase away the feelings of this anxious night ; for, while I was repeating, and endeavouring to call to mind the appropriate tone and action to the following words, 'Here's the smell of blood still !' my dresser innocently exclaimed, 'Dear me, ma'am, how very hysterical you are to-night ; I protest and vow, ma'am, it was not blood, but rose-pink and water ; for I saw the property-man mix it up with my own eyes.'"

## CHAPTER IX.

Observations on Mrs. Siddons's Estimate of *Lady Macbeth's* Character, and on that given by Mrs. Jameson, in her "Characteristics of Women."

THOSE who have read Mrs. Jameson's admirable "Characteristics of Women," must have remarked the general similarity of her opinions respecting *Lady Macbeth's* character, to those delivered by Mrs. Siddons in the foregoing critique. If there be any difference, it is that the former goes a shade farther than Mrs. Siddons in her advocacy of Shakspeare's heroine.

Whether Mrs. Jameson heard of Mrs. Siddons's ideas on the subject, which she might by possibility, as the great actress made no secret of them, I have never been in the least anxious to ascertain, because it is plain, from her writings, that Mrs. Jameson has a mind too original to require or to borrow suggestions from any one. But, in deprecating all suspicion of obligation on the one side, I have an equal right to exclude the possibility of its being suspected on the other. Mrs. Siddons showed me these Remarks on the Character of *Lady Macbeth* some nineteen years ago, so that there can be little doubt of their having been earlier written than those of the authoress of "The Characteristics."

In a general view, I agree with both of the fair advocates of *Lady Macbeth*, that the language of preceding critics was rather unmeasured, when they described her as "*thoroughly hateful, invariably savage, and purely demoniac*." It is true, that the ungentlemanly epithet, fiendlike, is applied to her by Shakspeare himself, but then he puts it into the mouth of *King Malcolm*, who might naturally be incensed.

*Lady Macbeth* is not thoroughly hateful, for she is not a *virago*, not an adulteress, not impelled by revenge. On the contrary, she expresses no feeling of personal malignity towards any human being in the whole course of her part. Shakspeare could have easily displayed her crimes in a more commonplace and accountable light, by assigning some feudal grudge as a mixed motive of her cruelty to *Duncan*; but he makes her a

murderess in cold blood, and from the sole motive of ambition, well knowing, that if he had broken up the inhuman serenity of her remorselessness by the ruffling of anger, he would have vulgarized the features of the splendid Titaness.

By this entire absence of petty vice and personal virulence, and by concentrating all the springs of her conduct into the one determined feeling of ambition, the mighty poet has given her character a statue-like simplicity, which, though cold, is spirit-stirring, from the wonder it excites, and which is imposing, although its respectability consists, as far as the heart is concerned, in merely negative decencies. How many villains walk the world in credit to their graves, from the mere fulfilment of those negative decencies. Had *Lady Macbeth* been able to smother her husband's babblings, she might have been one of them.

Shakspeare makes her a great character, by calming down all the pettiness of vice, and by giving her only one ruling passion, which, though criminal, has at least a lofty object, corresponding with the firmness of her will and the force of her intellect. The object of her ambition was a crown, which, in the days in which we suppose her to have lived, was a miniature symbol of divinity. Under the full impression of her intellectual powers, and with a certain allowance which we make for the illusion of sorcery, the imagination suggests to us something like a half-apology for her ambition. Though I can vaguely imagine the supernatural agency of the spiritual world, yet I know so little precisely about fiends or demons, that I cannot pretend to estimate the relation of their natures to that of Shakspeare's heroine. But, as a human being, *Lady Macbeth* is too intellectual to be thoroughly hateful. Moreover, I hold it no paradox to say, that the strong idea which Shakspeare conveys to us of her intelligence, is heightened by its contrast with that partial shade which is thrown over it by her sinful will giving way to superstitious influences. At times she is deceived, we should say, prosaically speaking, by the infatuation of her own wickedness, or, poetically speaking, by the agency of infernal tempters; otherwise she could not have imagined for a moment that she could palm upon the world the chamberlains of *Duncan* for his real murderers. Yet her mind, under the approach of this portentous and unnatural eclipse, in spite of its black illusions, has light enough remaining to show us a reading of *Macbeth's* character such as Lord Bacon could not have given to us more philosophically, or in fewer words.

All this, however, only proves *Lady Macbeth* to be a char-

acter of brilliant understanding, lofty determination, and negative decency. That the poet meant us to conceive her more than a piece of august atrocity, or to leave a tacit understanding of her being naturally amiable, I make bold to doubt. Mrs. Siddons, disposed by her own nature to take the most softened views of her heroine, discovers, in her conduct towards *Macbeth*, a dutiful and unselfish tenderness, which, I own, is far from striking me. "Lady Macbeth," she says, "seeks out *Macbeth*, that she may, at least, participate in his wretchedness." But is that her real motive? No; *Lady Macbeth*, in that scene, seems to me to have no other object than their common preservation. She finds that he is shunning society, and is giving himself up to "his sorry fancies." Her trying to snatch him from these is a matter of policy;—a proof of her sagacity, and not of her social sensibility. At least, insensitive as we have seen her to the slightest joy at the return of her husband, it seems unnecessary to ascribe to her any new-sprung tenderness, when self-interest sufficiently accounts for her conduct.

Both of her fair advocates lay much stress on her abstaining from vituperation towards *Macbeth*, when she exhorts him to retire to rest after the banquet. But, here I must own, that I can see no proof of her positive tenderness. Repose was necessary to *Macbeth's* recovery. Their joint fate was hanging by a hair; and she knew that a breath of her reproach, by inflaming him to madness, would break that hair, and plunge them both into exposure and ruin. Common sense is always respectable; and here it is joined with command of temper and matrimonial faith. But still her object includes her own preservation; and we have no proof of her alleged tenderness and sensibility.

If *Lady Macbeth's* male critics have dismissed her with un-gallant haste and harshness, I think the eloquent authoress of the "Characteristics of Women" has tried rather too elaborately to prove her positive virtues, by speculations which, to say the least of them, if they be true, are not certain. She goes beyond Mrs. Siddons's toleration of the heroine; and, getting absolutely in love with her, exclaims, "What would not the firmness, the self-command, the ardent affections of this woman have performed, if properly directed?" Why, her firmness and self-command are very evident; but, as to her ardent affections, I would ask, on what other object on earth she bestows them except the crown of Scotland? We are told, however, that her husband loves her, and that, therefore, she could not be naturally bad. But,

in the first place, though we are not directly told so, we may be fairly allowed to imagine her a very beautiful woman; and, with beauty and superior intellect, it is easy to conceive her managing and making herself necessary to *Macbeth*, a man comparatively weak, and, as we see, facile to wickedness. There are instances of atrocious women having swayed the hearts of more amiable men. What debars me from imagining that *Lady Macbeth* had obtained this conjugal ascendancy by any thing amiable in her nature, is, that she elicits *Macbeth's* warmest admiration in the utterance of atrocious feelings; at least, such I consider those expressions to be which precede his saying to her, "Bring forth men children only."

But here I am again at issue with the ingenious authoress of the "Characteristics," who reads in those very expressions that strike me as proofs of atrocity, distinct evidence of *Lady Macbeth's amiable character*: since, she declares that she had known what it was to have loved the offspring she suckled. The majority of she-wolves, I conceive, would make the same declaration if they could speak, though they would probably omit the addition about dashing out the suckling's brains. Again: she is amiably unable to murder the sleeping king, because, to use Mrs. Jameson's words, "he brings to her the dear and venerable image of her father." Yes: but she can send in her husband to do it for her. Did Shakspeare intend us to believe this murdereress naturally compassionate?

It seems to me, also, to be far from self-evident, that *Lady Macbeth* is not naturally cruel, because she calls on all the demons of human thought to unsex her; or because she dies of what her apologist calls remorse. If by that word we mean true contrition, Shakspeare gives no proof of her having shown such a feeling. Her death is mysterious; and we generally attribute it to despair and suicide. Even her terrible and thrice-repeated sob of agony, in the sleep-walking scene, shows a conscience haunted indeed by terrors, but not penitent; for she still adheres to her godless old ground of comfort, that "*Banquo is in his grave.*"

She dies,—she is swept away darkly from before us to her great account. I say that we have a tragic satisfaction in her death: and though I grant that we do not exult over her fate, yet I find no argument in this circumstance against her natural enormity. To see a fellow-creature, a beautiful woman, with a bright, bold intellect, thus summoned to her destiny, creates a religious feeling too profound for exultation.

In this terrible swift succession of her punishment to her

crimes, lies one of the master-traits of skill by which Shakespeare contrives to make us blend an awful feeling, somewhat akin to pity, with our satisfaction at her death.

Still I am persuaded that Shakspeare never meant her for any thing better than a character of superb depravity, and a being, with all her decorum and force of mind, naturally cold and remorseless. When Mrs. Jameson asks us, what might not religion have made of such a character? she puts a question that will equally apply to every other enormous criminal; for, the worst heart that ever beat in a human breast would be at once rectified, if you could impress it with a genuine religious faith. But if Shakespeare intended us to believe *Lady Macbeth's* nature a soil peculiarly adapted for the growth of religion, he has chosen a way very unlike his own wisdom in portraying her, for he exhibits her as a practical infidel in a simple age: and he makes her words sum up all the essence of that unnatural irreligion, which cannot spring up to the head without having its root in a callous heart. She holds that

“The sleeping and the dead  
Are but as pictures.”

And that

“Things without remedy,  
Should be without regard.”

There is something hideous in the very strength of her mind, that can dive down, like a wounded monster, to such depths of consolation.

She is a splendid picture of evil, nevertheless,—a sort of sister of Milton's *Lucifer*; and, like him, we surely imagine her externally majestic and beautiful. Mrs. Siddons's idea of her having been a delicate and blonde beauty, seems to me to be a pure caprice. The public would have ill exchanged such a representative of *Lady Macbeth*, for the dark locks and the eagle eyes of Mrs. Siddons.

In some other characters which Mrs. Siddons performed, the memory of the old, or the imagination of the young, might possibly conceive her to have had a substitute; but not in *Lady Macbeth*. The moment she seized the part, she identified her image with it in the minds of the living generation.

## CHAPTER X.

Continuation of the Season at Drury Lane—Mrs. Siddons plays *Desdemona*, Mason's *Elfride*, and *Rosalind*, in "As You Like It"—Mrs. Siddons in Scotland—Season 1785-6—She appears in the "Jubilee"—in Jephson's "Braganza"—as *Mrs. Lovemore*, in Murphy's Comedy of "The Way to Keep Him"—as *Hermione*, in "The Distressed Mother"—as *Ophelia*.

In some of the greatest dramatic characters, Mrs. Siddons needed only to look like her usual majestic self, in order to make you imagine that the poet had written the part for her. Her peculiar element was the sublime and energetic; and to have seen her *Lady Macbeth* might well inspire an incredulity as to the possibility of the same individual passing, with felicity, from the terrors of *Duncan's* murderer to look the gentleness of *Desdemona*. It is true that the bride of *Othello* is, with all her gentleness, a great being; and is as resolute in adherence to the noble Moor, as she had before been meekly dutious to her father. Moreover, if it be alleged that love alone makes her bold, be it remembered that her love itself is a high and pure passion, founded on the moral worth of her lord. But still there is a subdued spirit, a lowly, violet-like sweetness in *Desdemona*, that makes me wonder, at this day, how the august Siddons could have personated her as she did, even to perfect illusion. I can record the fact that she did so, from satisfactory evidence.

Under that head I am far from ranking my own humble testimony; but, leaving that to be valued at the reader's will, I beg leave to say that whether she might be greater or not, in other parts, I never wondered at her in any character so much as in *Desdemona*. Miss O'Neil was beautiful in the part, but nothing like Mrs. Siddons. The first time I saw the great actress represent *Desdemona* was at Edinburgh, when I was a very young man (I think it was in 1798). I had gone into the theatre without a play-bill; I knew not that she was in the place. I had never seen her before since I was a child of eight years old; and, though I ought to have recognised her from that circumstance, and from her picture, yet I was for some time not aware that I was looking at the Tragic Queen.

But her exquisite gracefulness, and the emotions and plaudits of the house, ere long convinced me that she must be some very great actress,—only the notion I had preconceived of her pride and majesty made me think that “*this soft, sweet creature could not be the Siddons.*” When I asked the person next me the name of the actress, I felt, or fancied, a tone of rebuke in his answer; as if he had said, Could you suppose that any other actress could affect the house in this manner?

I remember that what struck me with peculiar astonishment was the familiar, I had almost said playful, persuasiveness, with which she won over the Moor to *Cassio’s* interest. In that scene, it is my belief that no other actress ever softened and sweetened tragedy so originally.

I thank my brother biographer, Mr. Boaden, for saying, with equal truth and felicity of expression, that, in her acting of *Desdemona*, the very stature of the mighty actress seemed to be lowered. I am also happy to find my friend Mr. Bartley, the actor, enthusiastically fond of recollecting the Siddons’s *Desdemona*. Nor do I value lightly the contemporary testimony of the daily press on this occasion. They unanimously agree as to the fact, that Mrs. Siddons increased her popularity, great as it was, by this performance; and one of them concludes his account of it by saying, that “in this wonderful transition from *Lady Macbeth* to the bride of *Othello*, Mrs. Siddons had shown her genius to be a star of the first magnitude, that could reach and adorn the most distant and opposite points in the horizon of tragic excellence.”

A circumstance, personally unfortunate to her, occurred in her first representation of the part. They gave her, with criminal negligence, a damp bed to lie upon, in the death-scene, and she contracted from thence a rheumatic fever. Twice in the course of her life she encountered the most serious of stage perils. *Desdemona’s* sheets had nearly killed her with cold; and afterward, when she played *Hermione*, in the “*Winter’s Tale*,” from her drapery catching fire, she was in imminent danger of being burnt alive.

[April 14th, 1785.] She appeared in no other new part till Mason’s tragedy of “*Elfrida*,” which had been admired at Buckingham House, was brought out by command of their majesties.\* Its author is mentioned with personal regard by

\* Cast of parts: *Athelwold*, Smith; *Edgar*, Brereton; *Orgar*, J. Aickin; *Edwin*, Packer; *Elfrida*, Mrs. Siddons; *Albina*, Mrs. Brereton.

Mrs. Siddons, in her MS. Recollections. Speaking of her friend Lady Harcourt's country seat, she says, "When I was on my usual visit to this beautiful place, I have often walked arm-in-arm with the author of 'Caractacus,' and the amiable Whitehead. The former of these gentlemen, before I made his acquaintance, had conceived an inveterate dislike to me: he was a great humourist; but, with all his oddities, a benevolent man. He was petted and coaxed by Lord Harcourt, and by all the visitors indeed, like a spoiled child. He hated me, because he could not bear that I should be even compared with his departed friend and favourite, Mrs. Pritchard; and was so annoyed at the sound of my name, that, in order playfully to humour his prejudice, they sunk it, and always, in his hearing, called me the Lady. I arrived there at tea-time, and found him looking very sulky indeed, wrapped up in his Spanish cloak, which he called being out of humour. We happened somehow to be near each other at supper. I found his ice beginning to thaw, and the next morning, to the great amusement of the whole party, we were detected practising a duet in the breakfast room. From that time forth I had the honour of being in his good graces, for the too short period of his pious and valuable existence. When I arrived at his own habitation, on a visit for a few days, they told us he was absent, but would soon return. In the mean time, Mr. Siddons and I strolled to see him; and, when we entered, we saw the venerable man, the almost adored parish priest, in the organ-loft, teaching the children some music for the next Sunday. We left him undisturbed in his pious occupation, and returned to his house, where he soon received us with heartfelt cordiality. He spoke broad Yorkshire, and good-naturedly allowed us to accuse him of affectation in so doing; though, I believe, he was only affecting what was so natural to him that he could not avoid it."

With regard to Mrs. Siddons's *Elfrida*, I am inclined to believe the journalist's blunt report of her performance,\* namely, that "she had acted every thing in the part which she had to act, and looked the part as perfectly as possible; but that her powers and graces were exerted in vain in so dull a drama." She was called to perform it only twice.

There are two sorts of simplicity in the natural history of

\* *Morning Chronicle* for April 18, 1785.—" 'Elfrida' was not new to the stage when brought out at this period. It had been three times before tried at Covent Garden." And, still more strange to say, was tried at that house once more, in 1792.

poets—the right sort, the manly simplicity that makes him write like Burns and Crabbe, from the forcible dictates of nature ; and the wrong sort, perhaps, better entitled to the name of credulity, that gulls them to believe in the false resources of their art. The worthy and single-hearted Mason was of the latter description : he was one of those, to use Burns's words,

“ Who think to climb Parnassus' hill  
By dint o' Greek.”

He not only persuaded himself that he could incorporate the Attic chorus with the modern drama—an attempt like that of ingrafting a dead branch on a living tree, but he made his experiment with a play that is without action and without interest. We might forgive him for perverting history, and showing off *Elfrida*, who was a barbarous traitress, as a tender wife, but it defies all patience to find her employed in nothing but making speeches, and calling on her waiting-maids to strike up odes to the rising sun. In order to save her husband, and divert the king's affection, she makes a promise to stain and deform her beauty, but she never performs it ; and, when her lord is killed, she hurries off her poor maids into a nunnery, without consulting their inclinations. All this time he dreamed himself, and wrote to his friends, that he was imitating Sophocles !

[April 30.] The next new character which she performed was that of *Rosalind*, in “As You Like It.” After a successful transition from the greatest to the gentlest parts of tragedy, it would have been but one step farther, in the versatility of genius, to have been at home in the enchanting *Rosalind* ; and as the character, though comic, is not broadly so, and is as romantic and poetical as any thing in tragedy, I somewhat grudgingly confess my belief, that her performance of it, though not a failure, seems to have fallen equally short of a triumph. It appears that she played the part admirably in some particulars. But, altogether, *Rosalind's* character has a gay and feathery lightness of spirits, which one can easily imagine more difficult for Mrs. Siddons to assume than the tragic meekness of *Desdemona*. In “As You Like It,” *Rosalind* is the soul of the piece, aided only by the *Clown* (and, O that half the so-called wise were as clever as Shakspeare's clowns !)—she has to redeem the wildness of a forest, and the dulness of rustic life. Her wit and beauty have “to throw a sunshine in the shady place.” Abate but a spark of her spirit, and we should become, in the forest scenes, as melancholy and moralizing as *Jaques*. Shakspeare's *Rosalind*, therefore, requires the gayest

and archest representative. In a letter from Mr. Young, which I have before me, he says, "Her *Rosalind* wanted neither playfulness nor feminine softness; but it was totally without archness,—not because she did not properly conceive it; but how could such a countenance be arch?"

Here alone, I believe, in her whole professional career, Mrs. Siddons found a rival, who beat her out of a single character. The rival *Rosalind* was Mrs. Jordan: but those who best remember Mrs. Jordan, will be the least surprised at her defeating her great contemporary in this one instance. Mrs. Jordan was, perhaps, a little too much of the romp in some touches of the part; but, altogether, she had the *naïveté* of it to a degree that Shakspeare himself, if he had been a living spectator, would have gone behind the scenes to salute her for her success in it.

Anna Seward, who, though her taste was exceedingly bad in many points, had a due appreciation of our great actress, speaks of her as follows in the part of *Rosalind*. "For the first time, I saw the justly celebrated Mrs. Siddons in comedy, in *Rosalind*; but, though her smile is as enchanting as her frown is magnificent—as her tears are irresistible, yet the playful scintillations of colloquial wit which most strongly mark that character, suit not the dignity of the Siddonian form and countenance. Then her dress was injudicious. The scrupulous prudery of decency produced an ambiguous vestment that seemed neither male nor female. But," Miss Seward adds, "when she first came on as the *Princess*, nothing could be more charming; nor than when she resumed her original character, and exchanged comic spirit for dignified tenderness."

During the season 1784-5, Mrs. Siddons performed seventy-one nights, and in seven new characters. Of these she played *Margaret of Anjou* thrice; *Zara* twice; *Lady Macbeth* thirteen times; *Desdemona* four times; *Elfrida* twice; and *Rosalind* twice.

Mrs. Siddons's salary, as I have already mentioned, was, on her return to Drury Lane, in 1782, ten guineas per week. When John Kemble joined the company, his salary was five guineas.

In 1784, Mrs. Siddons's salary was raised to twenty-three guineas and seven shillings per week, and Mr. Kemble's to ten guineas.

In the summer of the year she performed at Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Belfast, and Glasgow. On crossing the Tweed for a second time, she had no longer to complain of

the sluggishness of Scottish enthusiasm. A rustic in the Glasgow theatre was so enchanted, that he exclaimed, "She is a fallen angel!" and in Edinburgh, the people collected in a vast crowd before her lodgings. Though there was a multitude, however, of the lowest people, there was not a mob. On the contrary, the decorousness of the national character was shown, by the many thousands who collected to look at her, observing the most respectful silence. I heard another instance, lately, of the strong impression which she had now made on the feelings of the Scotch. A lady is still living in Edinburgh who was at that period one of her ardent admirers, and who was herself looked up to in the higher circles of the Scottish capital for her taste and intelligence. Her once vivid faculties, however, are now sunk in the torpor of extreme old age. She is blind, and scarcely ever speaks or expresses interest in any worldly subject. A friend went to see her, and by some chance the name of Mrs. Siddons was mentioned, when the venerable invalid astonished her family by breaking her accustomed silence, and speaking of a matter that regarded this world with warm and prolonged interest. She dwelt earnestly on her recollections of the great actress; and the subject brought smiles over her features, though they were pale with a hundred years.

Old Drury was again opened on the 7th of September, 1785. The first new part which she performed this season [Oct. 20] was that of the *Duchess*,\* in Jephson's "Braganza." In this character Mrs. Yates had been often admired; and I remember Mrs. Siddons saying that she thought "Braganza" very passable for a modern tragedy. Without pretending to uphold Jephson as any thing like a masterly dramatist, I must confess I have a certain liking for his literary memory. It may seem contemptuous to say that I cannot praise him so much as I could wish; but, since I knew nothing of the man, that very regret shows that his writings must have given me some pleasure. At a time when the native genius of Tragedy seemed to be extinct, he came boldly forward as a tragic poet, and certainly, with a spark of talent: for if he has not the full flame of genius, he has at least its scintillating light. In fervour and boldness he is somewhat deficient; but, in more than one of his tragedies, I cannot help thinking him graceful and touching. The following scene, in his "Duke of Braganza," in which *Velasquez*, the Spanish minister, engages a monk to poison the *Duke*, appears to me to be far from indifferent:

\* *Duke of Braganza*, Kemble; *Velasquez*, Smith.

## TRAGEDY OF BRAGANZA.

*Act 3, Scene 1. The Apartments of VELASQUEZ.*

*Velasquez.*

‘Attends the monk Ramirez?’

*Enter RAMIREZ.*

‘You are welcome,  
Most welcome, reverend father. Pray draw near;  
We have a business for your privacy  
Of an especial kind; the circling air  
Should not partake it, nor the babbling winds,  
Lest their invisible wings disperse the breath  
Of that main secret which thy faithful bosom  
Is only fit to treasure.’

*Ramirez.*

‘Good, my lord:  
I am no common talker.’

*Velasquez.*

‘Well I know it;  
And therefore choose thee from the brotherhood;  
Not one of whom but would lay by all thoughts  
Of earth and heaven, and fly to execute  
What I, the voice of Spain, commissioned him.

Observe me well.

Think not I mean to snatch a thankless office,  
Who serves the state while I direct her helm.  
Say, can you be content in these poor weeds,—  
To know no earthly hopes beyond a cloister;  
But, stretch’d on musty mats in noisome caves,  
To rouse at midnight bells, and mutter prayers,  
For souls beyond their reach, to senseless saints:  
To wage perpetual war with nature’s bounty:  
*To blacken sick men’s chambers, and be number’d  
With the loath’d leavings of mortality—  
The watch-light, hour-glass, and the nauseous phial?*  
Are these the ends of life? Was this fine frame—  
Nerves exquisitely textur’d—soft desires—  
Aspiring thoughts—this comprehensive soul,  
With all her train of godlike faculties—  
Given to be sunk in this vile drudgery?’

*Ramirez.*

‘These are the hard conditions of our state.  
We sow our humble seeds, with toil on death,  
To reap the harvest of our hopes in heaven.’

*Velasquez.*

‘Yet wiser they who trust no future chance,

But make this earth a heaven. Raise thy eyes :  
 Up to the temporal splendours of our church ;  
 Behold our priors, prelates, cardinals ;  
 Survey their large revenues, princely state,  
 Their palaces of marble, beds of down ;  
 Their statues, pictures, baths, luxurious tables,  
 That shame the fabled banquets of the gods !  
 See how they weary art, and ransack nature,  
 To leave no taste, no wish ungratified !  
 Now—if thy spirit shrink not—I can raise thee  
 To all this pomp and greatness. Pledge thy faith ;  
 Swear thou wilt do this thing—whate'er I urge ;  
 And Lisbon's envied crozier shall be thine.'

The next novelty of the season was the celebration of a pageant called "The Jubilee." This entertainment, according to the contemporary newspapers, had been written, prepared, and produced by Garrick, as a laughable representation of his own "Jubilee," held at Stratford-upon-Avon, in honour of Shakespeare, in 1769. At its first appearance it had a run of seventy nights ; and was deservedly a popular pageant, if we may trust the same newsmen, from its containing so much whimsical stage bustle, pleasant nonsense, charming music, and splendid representation. But, though it was now got up with great care and expense, I believe, its *pleasant nonsense* seldom occasioned a renewed exhibition. It contained a procession of emblematic theatrical characters, in which Mrs. Siddons appeared in a triumphal car as the Tragic Muse.

On the 26th of November, Mrs. Siddons played the part of *Mrs. Lovemore*, in Murphy's comedy of "The Way to Keep Him;" a piece that is tolerably humorous, but very absurd, in its pretensions to moral meaning respecting the secret of preserving connubial happiness. *Mrs. Lovemore*, young, beautiful, and amiable, but of a serious temper, somewhat inclined to be sombrous, has to lament the estrangement of a husband, who seldom either dines or sleeps at home. The news that he spent his evenings at the house of a handsome widow, *Mrs. Belmour*, is first babbled by a footman to a waiting-maid, and by her duly whispered to *Mrs. Lovemore*. To the suspected syren widow the forlorn wife repairs, introduces herself, though a stranger, and implores her not to rob her of her husband's society. The widow *Belmour* swears, as she can conscientiously, that she knows no such person as *Mr. Lovemore*, but she is receiving, as she conceives, the honourable addresses of an unmarried gentleman, *Lord Etheridge*, though, in due time, it turns out that her wooer has been wearing a false title, and that *my lord* and *Mr. Lovemore* are one and the same worthy person. On this discovery, she of course discards *Lord Etheridge*, but

contracts a friendship for the injured wife, and puts her upon a plan for recovering her partner's "*lost affections*." It may puzzle the moralist to anticipate what human means are to secure the affections of such a vagrant as *Lovemore*; who, in the course of the play, utters not one word of truth, except when he tells *Sir Brilliant Fashion* "we are both rascals!" The widow *Belmour* advises his wife to rally her husband,—even to pique his jealousy a little; but at all events to be sprightly and joyous. In the sad reality of life, such a receipt for recovering stolen or strayed affections would, in all probability, be about as effective as advertising a reward for them by the town-crier. But they manage things better on the stage. The widow's counsel effects its end; and the piece ends happily.

The character of *Mrs. Lovemore*, though she is ultimately called on to assume hilarity, is thus, in the main, serious and pathetic; and in so far it was appropriate to Mrs. Siddons: but it was complained of, and I fear with justice, that she made the injured wife too tragic for comedy. The contemporary diurnals, indeed, almost unanimously pronounced her *Mrs. Lovemore* to be a total failure. In so far they contradicted themselves that they allowed she got some applause; but they dressed their friendly regrets in the deepest mourning of language, and talked with solemn imagery of Mrs. Siddons's descent from the tragic throne, and of her appearing as the dis-crowned Queen of Tragedy by the side of Mrs. Farren, who was courtesying to far louder applauses than any that greeted the Siddons. It should have occurred to them, that if she did quit the tragic throne for a night, there was nobody to step up to it in her place. At the same time, it must be owned, that in the field of Comedy she gathered no laurels.

On the 27th of December, 1785, she gave birth to her second son, George. How fleeting is human life! I remember this son of Mrs. Siddons as freshly as if we had met but yesterday. He was then a youth about fourteen, and I recollect, when we sat together in the theatre, being struck by his sensibility at the sight of his mother's acting. About the third part of a century has since elapsed. George Siddons is now a grandfather, and has been thirty years in India, where he has made his fortune. His eldest daughter is married to the celebrated oriental scholar, Mr. Wilson, of Oxford.

The very day after her appearance as *Mrs. Lovemore*, Covent Garden lost its best actor, and the British stage one of its brightest ornaments, by the death of Henderson. He was lamented by all who knew him, and by none more than by Mrs.

Siddons, who was bound to him by gratitude for his prediction of her greatness. She volunteered her services to his family; and on the 26th of February, 1786, she played *Belvidera* for their benefit, at Covent Garden, which was then the more splendid of the two houses, and capable of greater receipts. Mr. Pope was her *Jaffier*, and Aickin played *Pierre*.

[1786.] During this season she appeared in March, as the heroine, in Delap's "Captives,"\* and Mrs. Hannah More's "Percy."† If I were asked why she condescended to act in two such miserable tragedies, I should answer, that she had no power of rejecting any part in a play that was accepted by the managers; and that if she had even possessed such a royal veto, its exercise might have been unsafe and invidious.

For her first benefit, this season, she played *Hermione*, in the "Distressed Mother;" preferring, in this instance, the part of the violent heroine to that of the amiable *Andromache*, which was performed by her sister, Miss Kemble.‡

I am not surprised at her preference of the more vehement character; for the conscientious Distressed Mother is rather an insipid personage. She is the only character in the tragedy that is not in love, and yet the only one that escapes with good fortune. *Hermione*, on the contrary, engrosses all the little interest of the play, at least in its English shape. In the French original, the sparkling graces of Racine's language partially atone to us for the thinness of his incidents, and the want of strength in his story. But the spirit of his style evaporates in the Englishman's transfusion of it into blank verse. Nevertheless, in the translation itself, though *Orestes* and the *Widow of Hector* are but dull worthies, some interest is left in *Hermione*. In the agony of her struggle to overcome her fondness for *Pyrrhus*, and to bestow it on *Orestes*, there is a strongly condensed utterance of passion in her words,

"And, if I've power o'er my own heart, 'tis his;"

and her turning round upon *Orestes*, with indignation and ab-

\* The tragedy of "The Captives" was acted March 9, 1786. *Erragon, Prince of Sora*, Smith; *Connal, King of Morven*, Barrymore; *Hillardan*, Bensley; *Malvina* (the wife of *Erragon*), Mrs. Siddons; *Minla* (her Friend), Miss Kemble.

† "Percy" was acted March 25. *Percy*, Palmer; *Douglas*, Kemble; *Raby*, J. Aickin; *Hubert*, Packer; *Elwina*, Mrs. Siddons; *Bertha*, Mrs. Ward.

‡ Cast of parts in "The Distressed Mother," as it was acted at Drury Lane, March 4, 1786. *Orestes*, Smith; *Pyrrhus*, Palmer; *Hermione*, Mrs. Siddons; *Andromache*, Miss Kemble.

horrence at the murder which he has committed at her bidding, is at once poetically just and dramatically striking.

In the scene where *Hermione* commands *Orestes* to commit the murder, Mrs. Siddons was memorably impressive. The heroine says to her suitor,

‘Haste to the temple ;  
Haste, prince, and sacrifice him.’

*Orestes.*

‘Whom ?’

*Hermione.*

‘Why, Pyrrhus !’

Mrs. Siddons, at that word, disengaged her train from the upholding attendant, and pronounced the name of *Pyrrhus* with an emphasis that thrilled the remotest auditor.

I am surprised at Mr. Boaden’s affirming that, when this tragedy first came out, the writer of the *Spectator* used the little disingenuous art of totally concealing its French origin. That writer speaks of having seen “The Distressed Mother” performed ; and, at the first performance, it was ushered in by a prologue from the pen of Steele, in which direct notice is taken of its being a translation :

“This piece, presented in a foreign tongue,  
When France was glorious and her monarch young.”

After Steele’s prologue had thus publicly advertised the fact, the *Spectator* would have been out of his wits if he had thought of concealing it ; and, indeed, he says nothing inconsistent with the supposition that it was commonly known. Phillips avowed himself Racine’s translator in the first copy of the play that he published.

For her second benefit, this season, Mrs. Siddons played *Ophelia*.\* Having never seen her in the character, I must own that I cannot speak of her performance of it without some doubt. On the one hand, Mr. Boaden says that she made it deeply affecting ; and the criticism of the press generally concurs in extolling her performance of it, which makes it likely that there was a corresponding feeling in the public mind. It is also a striking circumstance, that her fellow-actress, who played the *Queen*, in “Hamlet,” was so electrified by the Siddons’s looks, when she seized her arm, that she hesitated, and

\* May 15, 1786. *Hamlet*, Kemble ; the *Ghost*, Bensley.

forgot her part. On the other hand, though Mrs. Siddons was a passable vocalist, yet I can hardly imagine her powers of singing adapted for the wild tenderness of *Ophelia*; and, if she succeeded so absolutely in the part, why did she never perform it a second time?\* Her greatness in the characters that formed her true element, forbids our ranging one iota beyond them in search of questionable merits. Her fame despairs all alliance with doubt.

Of all that has been written about *Hamlet* and *Ophelia*, I best like the remarks of Mrs. Jameson, in her *Characteristics of Women*. If the authoress of that charming work had ever seen Mrs. Siddons in this part, I should go far to consult her opinion on the subject. But *Ophelia's* critic is of a later generation, and I ought not ungallantly to wish a lady to be older than she is.

The same evening that she played *Ophelia*, Mrs. Siddons performed the *Lady*, in Milton's "Comus," if the masque can be called Milton's which was mutilated from the original, for stage performance, by Dalton and Colman. The latter of these stage adaptors tells us, that Milton's poetry, unless it caught the audience by singing, was always coldly received. If so, Mrs. Siddons's finest elocution could be of little avail. But the truth is, that Milton's poetry is not theatrical.

During this, which was her third season, Mrs. Siddons acted fifty-five times. I think it was in the character of *Desdemona* alone that she could be said to have acquired fresh fame. In the summer recess, she made her usual tour of the provincial theatres.

\* The most interesting performance of *Ophelia* that I have met with on record, was that of Mrs. Susannah Mountford, the daughter of the celebrated actor whose untimely death has been mentioned in the third chapter of the present work. I quote the anecdote from Mr. Genest's "Account of the English Stage." It was first given by Mrs. Bellamy, who had it from Colley Cibber. "Mrs. Mountford, during her last years, became deranged, but, as her disorder was not outrageous, she was not placed under any rigorous confinement, but was suffered to walk about her house. One day, in a lucid interval, she asked what play was to be performed that evening, and was told it was to be 'Hamlet.' While she was on the stage, she had acted *Ophelia* with great applause; the recollection struck her, and, with all that cunning which is so frequently allied to insanity, she found means to elude the care of her attendants, and got to the theatre, where, concealing herself till the scene where *Ophelia* was to make her appearance in her mad state, she pushed upon the stage before the person appointed to play the character, and exhibited a representation of it that astonished the performers as well as the audience. She exhausted her vital powers in this effort, was taken home, and died soon after."

## CHAPTER XI.

Season at Drury Lane, 1786-7—Mrs. Siddons plays *Cleone*—*Imogen*—*Hortensia*, in the “Count of Narbonne”—*Lady Resiless*, in the Comedy of “All in the Wrong”—*Julia*, in the “Italian Lover”—*Alicia*, in “Jane Shore.”

[1786.] DRURY LANE was reopened on the 16th of September, 1786. But Mrs. Siddons had no new part till the 22d of November; when Dodsley’s tragedy of “Cleone” was brought out, for the first time, at that house.\* It had been offered to Garrick as early as 1758, and his declining it was ascribed to the piece containing no part in which he could himself appear; though, in my humble opinion, the tragedy itself makes the best apology for his refusal. It was accepted, however, in the same year, at Covent Garden, where Mrs. Bellamy’s bewitching screams gave it a run for sixteen nights,—exactly eight times the number of hearings which Mrs. Siddons’s acting could ever obtain for it.

It is well known that Robert Dodsley raised himself, by his talents and good conduct, from a humble station to wealth and consequence, and that he was a useful publisher and a most respectable man. He left literature indebted to him on the whole; though not for this tragedy. Mr. Genest calls it tolerable: but I would rather substitute the words of *Dogberry*, that “*it is most tolerable, and not to be endured.*” The hero, *Sifroy*, is a sort of would-be *Othello*, with the difference that *Othello* is of a noble nature, excited to jealousy by skilful villainy, while *Sifroy* is a silly dupe of the shallowest artifice. In short, the dulness of “Cleone” has no relief, except its torpedo-like shocks of improbability.

Having had occasion, in writing the present work, to read over all the dull plays in which Mrs. Siddons was condemned to perform a part, I have endeavoured to indemnify myself by the reperusal of Shakspeare; and I have thus had room to speculate on the nature of dramatic poetry, from the most contrasted impressions it could produce. The word *improbability* brings to my mind not only the besetting sin of the dra-

\* Cast of parts. *Sifroy*, J. Kemble; *Glanville*, Bensley; *Beaufort*, sen. J. Aickin; *Beaufort, jun.* Barrymore; *Cleone*, Mrs. Siddons; *Isabella*, Mrs. Ward.

matic dunces, but a laughable apology for it which one of them offers, in the preface to his own condemned tragedy, and a protest which he solemnly enters against the injustice of its damnation. "You" (the critics of the day) says the dolorous author, "harp eternally on my improbabilities. You deal rigorously with inferior dramatists on the score of their delinquencies as to the probable ; but, when the same fault is found in some great master, like Shakspeare, oh, then you give the word probability quite a liberal and kindly latitude of interpretation. And *is not improbability as great a sin in the richest, as it is in the poorest dramatic genius?*"

To this question, which reminds me of the ass in the fable, wondering why he might not fawn upon his master like a lap-dog, I trust the reader anticipates my answer, which is flatly—No ! Improbability, for its own sake, we never desire ; but we forgive the fault, in proportion as it is redeemed by wit and genius. In truth, the inspired dramatist softens the aspect of improbability, and causes it to put on a look of the probable. He makes only an initiatory demand on our credulity ; and then he pours in such successive touches of nature, that his picture of it becomes at once more pleasing than reality, and, to our fascinated imagination, equally true.

In the "Merchant of Venice," for instance, though there are one or two stumbling-blocks at the threshold, over which the genius of Shaspeare alone could help us, yet, when we get over these, we find ourselves at home, and in a pleasant mansion. We must forget the difficulty of *Portia* disguising her sex, and appearing before the judgment-seat, as well as the improbable nature of the contract. But, surmount these obstacles, and the rest all follows like logic, for what can be more lawyer-like than the whole pleading of *Portia*, and the quibble by which she gets rid of the pound of flesh ?

Here we have a true poet dealing with the daringly improbable ; but, on the other hand, when the ungifted dramatist gets you into unlikely conceptions, he drags you through a slough of them ; and he makes his improbabilities breed beyond Malthusian calculation.

In the drama, it is clear we must open our minds to the boldness of fiction, dramatic art being extremely difficult. Its poet cannot, like a narrator, come forth and explain all matters himself, but must speak only through his characters ; yet all the while he is bound to strike and surprise us. Common-place events will not serve this end : he must give us such as are uncommon. The uncommon borders on the marvellous ;

and the marvellous, though not necessarily incredible, requires a facile and fanciful state of belief. When dramatic poetry, therefore, reveals a certain degree of beauty, it expands the imagination beyond prosaic and literal calculations into a willing faith in romantic probability. A solid dunce he must be who would calculate the casket and judgment scenes of the "Merchant of Venice" by the every day probabilities of life. But, while we grant this indulgence to genius, if it be asked whether we can extend it to different talent, the answer must be that we assuredly do not and cannot. The romance of the fancy is a sun-flower that will open itself only to Apollo. Whatever we give to inspired fiction is repaid to us with lavish interest: but our faith can have no dealings with dulness in affairs of the marvellous.

To return to Dodsley. I am no way surprised that the Drury Lane audience had no desire to see our great actress herself in "Cleone" beyond the second night. Even on that evening the boxes were observed to be almost deserted; and the reason assigned was, that she had affected the ladies too much at the former representation. It was said of Dr. Duigenan that he had as strong an influence over the House of Commons as Grattan himself; for, if Grattan could fill the House, the other could at any time empty it. In the same manner, the author of "Cleone" might boast that he had called forth a perfectly new power in Mrs. Siddons's acting,—that of thinning her audiences.

1787.] The next new part which she assumed was that of *Imogen*, in "Cymbeline."\* This play, one of the loveliest creations of Shakspeare's fancy, is, perhaps, the fittest in his whole theatre to illustrate the principle which I have just been pointing out, namely, that great dramatic genius can occasionally venture on bold improbabilities, and yet not only shrive the offence, but leave us enchanted with the offender. The wager of *Posthumus*, in "Cymbeline," is a very unlikely one. I certainly dislike that spirit of detraction which obviously pervades Mrs. Lennox's dissections of Shakspeare; but really, when she puts the question, whether a noble-minded prince acts consistently in betting on his wife's chastity, I am at a loss how to answer her. Schlegel, the hierophant of Shakspeare, admits that *Posthumus's* character is somewhat sacrificed for the sake of counterbalancing effect. Hazlitt avoids the question; and Mrs. Jameson apologises for the wager on the score of the *rude times*. There is so much anachronism in a play where

\* Jan. 26, 1787. *Posthumus*, J. Kemble; *Iachimo*, Smith.

British princes and Romans appear in one scene, and a French gentleman in another, that we are left with but vague conceptions of the suitable manners. But in no age or state of manners would a sensible man have closed with *Iachimo's* challenge; and the more that we hear of *Posthumus* being such a creature,

“As to seek through the regions of the earth  
For one his like, there would be something failing  
In him that should compare,”

the more we wonder at his undignified bet.

Let us deal honestly with the objection; and admit the wager to be improbable. But still we have enough in the play to make us forget it, and more than forgive it. Shakspeare fore-saw that, from this license, he could deduce delightful scenes and situations; and he scrupled not to hazard it. The faulty incident may thus be compared to a little fountain, which, though impregnated with some unpalatable mineral, gives birth to a large stream; and that stream, as it proceeds, soon loses its taint of taste in the sweet and many waters that join its course.

Be the wager what it may, it gives birth to charming incidents. It introduces us to a feast of the chapest luxury, in the sleeping scene, when we gaze on the shut eyelids of *Imogen*. And that scene (how ineffably rich as well as modest!) is followed by others, that swell our interest to enchantment. *Imogen's* character hallows to the imagination every thing that loves her, and that she loves in return: and, when she forgives *Posthumus*, who may dare to refuse him pardon? Then, in her friendship with her unconscious brothers of the mountain-cave, what delicious touches of romance! I think I exaggerate not, in saying that Shakspeare has nowhere breathed more pleasurable feelings over the mind, as an antidote to tragic pain, than in “Cymbeline.” Yet, why do I doubt of my partiality to this tragedy of Shakspeare's being perfectly just? It is only because among the masterpieces of Shakspeare—a pretty numerous class,—if I were asked which was my chief favourite, I should always be apt to answer, *That which I have last read.*

In the tragedy of “Cymbeline,” we have a deep curiosity for *Imogen's* destiny; wonderfully sustained, at the same time, with a never-doubting hope. We see futurity in the story as through a richly-stained window, that hides the landscape, and yet glows with its light.

Mrs. Siddons was peculiarly happy in *Imogen*. She gave

greatness to the character, without diminishing its gentleness. I believe that a feeling of rivalship with Mrs. Jordan was not quite unconcerned with her motives for wishing to play the part. In tragic acting, she had palpably defeated the Yates and the Crawford; and, though Miss Farren still showed herself in the "Winter's Tale" as *Hermione*, she had no tragic popularity that could in the least alarm Mrs. Siddons. But Mrs. Jordan had admirers absurd enough to predict her greatness in tragedy; and she had played *Bellario* and *Imogen* with no small celebrity in the preceding season. By acting *Imogen* only once, our great actress put a stop to Mrs. Jordan's competition with her on the graver stage. *Imogen*, having to repulse *Cloten*, and to rebuke *Iachimo*, requires not only sweetness, but dignity of demeanour. Of the latter princely quality the lovely and romping Mrs. Jordan had not a particle.\*

On the 15th of March, she found a new character in the *Hortensia* of Jephson's "Count of Narbonne."† This tragedy is avowedly taken from Walpole's "Castle of Otranto;" though, of course, there is no preternatural agency represented on the stage. The hero of the play, like that of the romance, has inherited his estate from an unrighteous owner; and the curse of unexpiated blood hangs over his house. The heirs-apparent successively die. The last of them perishes, not, as in Walpole's romance, by the fall of a gigantic helmet, but by being thrown from his horse in the chase. He is not, like the heir

\* Mrs. Siddons had to play this character, during some of the scenes, in man's attire. From all that I can collect, she was here more fortunate than in *Rosalind*. A letter of hers is now before me, which she wrote to Mr. Hamilton, the painter, just before she appeared in the part.

"To Mr. Hamilton, Dean-street, Soho.

"Mrs. Siddons presents her compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, and wishes them many happy returns of this joyous season (Christmas). She hopes they will do her the favour to lay their commands upon her, at all times, when they are disposed to amuse themselves an hour or two at the theatre. She is very much afraid they have deserted poor Old Drury.

"Mrs. Siddons would be extremely obliged to Mr. Hamilton, if he would be so good as to make her a slight sketch for a boy's dress, to conceal the person as much as possible, as she was obliged to give the one he was so good as to make for *Rosalind* to Mrs. O'Neil, when she was last in Ireland. Mrs. Siddons soon hopes to bring the little folks to see their old friend. She expects them all this week. The dress is for *Imogen*, but Mrs. Siddons does not wish to have it known."

† *Raymond*, Mr. Kemble; *Austin*, Bensley; *Theodore*, Bannister, jun.; *Adelaide*, Mrs. Crouch.

of Ouranto, a sickly weakling, but a noble and promising youth. The father's shock at losing him so abruptly, in the bloom of youth, is well described. He had mourned over his other sons, he says, but their sickness had slowly prepared him for losing them :

"I saw my lilies drooping, and, accustomed  
To see them dying, bore to see them dead."

Jephson is abundant in such touches of amenity ; but this tragedy is weak as a whole, and the part of *Hortensia*, the wife of the Count of Narbonne, was by no means worthy of Mrs. Siddons's powers.

A few days afterward, March 29, for her brother's benefit, she acted *Lady Restless*, in Murphy's diverting comedy of "All in the Wrong."\* "Mrs. Siddons," says Boaden, "had as much bustle as the restless lady required, and spoke the dialogue naturally and skilfully, but the laugh excited was not of the hearty kind."

My own impression, the only time I ever saw her in comedy, which was at Edinburgh, and in the last century, was scarcely so favourable to her comic powers as that which Mr. Boaden here expresses ; and I believe, at this moment, that it was correct. She played *Lady Townly*, I thought, with so marvellous a lack of airiness, that when I came to London, and had the honour of being introduced to her, a surprising addition to my pleasure in forming her acquaintance was, to find that she had a vast relish for humour, ay, and a fund of laughable anecdotes in conversation. In her own slow way, she told a comic story inimitably ; and I have heard her read scenes in comedy with irresistible effect. The impression made by those readings, and my constant perception, during a long acquaintance, of a strong and *naïve* sense of humour in her character, by degrees led me to wonder how it was that nature had not fitted her to be ambidextrous on the stage. I was at one time, I must confess, almost a convert to the doctrine of my gifted friend Joanna Baillie, who still insists that nothing but unfair discouragement prevented Mrs. Siddons from being a great comic actress. My leaning towards this opinion, though I have at last abjured it, was increased by finding Oxberry, an ill-natured, but rather shrewd writer about theatricals, and himself an artist, somewhat an admirer of Mrs. Siddons in comedy. Mr. Godwin, a

\* For Kemble's benefit. *Sir John Restless*, King ; *Beverley*, Kemble ; *Belinda*, Miss Farren.

better authority, for whose friendly interest in the present work I owe my warmest acknowledgments, also spoke to me of the great felicity of her comic acting in the part of *Portia*; and he had the kindness to favour me, soon after our conversation, with the following note.

“ *New Palace Yard;*  
“ *Friday Evening, Oct. 18, 1833.*

“ **MY DEAR SIR,**

“ It struck me, after you left us this morning, that I had answered your question respecting Mrs. Siddons’s performance of the character of *Portia*, in the “ *Merchant of Venice*,” with more than my usual imperfection and generality; and, as you flatter me by laying a stress on my opinion, I am desirous of supplying this defect.

“ I should say, therefore, that there was a most striking fascination in her manner of exhibiting what she had to do in the fifth act. The scene is merely a light one, exhibiting the perplexity into which she throws *Bassanio*, by persisting that he had given his ring to a woman, and not to a man. This would appear almost nothing from a female of gamesome and rattling character, and would have made little impression. But Mrs. Siddons had a particular advantage, from the gravity of her general demeanour; and there was something inexpressibly delightful in beholding a woman of her general majesty condescend for once to become sportive. There was a marvellous grace in her mode of doing this; and her demure and queen-like smile, when, appearing to be most in earnest, she was really most in jest, gave her a loveliness that it would be in vain for me to endeavour to find words to express.

“ Believe me, my dear sir,

“ Very faithfully yours,

“ **WILLIAM GODWIN.**

I believe that Mr. Godwin, in the word *condescend*, explains the secret of all Mrs. Siddons’s limited power in comedy; for some power she certainly had, though it was not much. George Colman called her, in comedy, “ a frisking Gog.” Joanna Baillie and myself, less witty, but much more reverential towards the great actress, in our gratitude for her condescension to be mirthful, I have no doubt, exaggerated her comic powers. I had something like a remaining doubt upon the subject, when, about a year ago, I waited on the famous comedian Bannister, as an applicant for whatever recollections

of the Siddons he could afford me. I am ashamed to say, that, idol as he is of my youthful recollections, I made thus late my personal acquaintance with him. Bannister was certainly not the chief of convulsively droll actors; but he was, to my humble taste, something better,—one who made you forget that you were looking at a play. He was pure hilarity, and plain English nature. Without a trait of grimace on his comely countenance, he always came in as if he had been breathing the fresh air of the country, and he was more than an actor by seeming to be no actor at all, but a gloriously pleasant fellow, helping you to enjoy a joke.

Bannister spoke of Mrs. Siddons with delightful enthusiasm. Her noble features, he remarked, though large enough to command attention at a distance, were animated by so constant an expression of good sense, that they kept up a respectful feeling still more strongly in the person who was acting with her on the stage than in the far off spectator. A smile, he said, was not habitual to her; but, when it did mantle in her countenance, it came to the heart, not like the sunshine that all could share, but as an individual and flattering compliment. Bannister had at first, I thought, a delicate reserve in touching on the subject of her talents for comedy, and suffered me, without contradiction, to say, that surely some passages of her *Rosalind* must have been respectable; but when I requested of his candour to tell me whether her comic acting had, in any character, or in the smallest degree, ever pleased him, he shook his head, and remarked that the burthen of her inspiration was too weighty for comedy.\*

Very soon after her experiment as *Lady Restless*, the pen

\* Bannister's anecdotes about himself more than repaid me for his refusal to praise the comedy of Mrs. Siddons. He began his own stage career in tragedy, and played the hero in Voltaire's "Mahomet." Garrick, who had trained him to the part, met him the next day, after he had acquired some applauses in *Mahomet*, and asked him, with his usual abundance of gesture and eh, ehs, what character he wished to play next. "Why," said Bannister, "I was thinking of *Oroonoko*."—"Eh," said David, staring at Bannister, who was at that time very thin, "you will look as much like *Oroonoko* as a chimney-sweeper in a consumption." Bannister told me, that at these words of Garrick, his knees slackened, and he had almost sunk down on the pavement. At another interview, he ventured to tell the English Roscius that he had some thoughts of attempting comedy. "Eh, eh?" said Garrick, "why no, don't think of that, you may humbug the town for some time longer as a tragedian; but *comedy is a serious thing*, so don't try it yet." Bannister, however, attempted comedy; and his *Don Whiskerando* (as he himself says) laughed his tragedy out of fashion.

of Jephson furnished her with a new and original tragic character in his play of "Julia, or the Italian Lover." The genius of that writer is just sufficient, in my mind, to excite a moderate partiality; but I should do injustice to Jephson not to acknowledge, that his tragedy of "Julia," and particularly the trial scene, was good enough to give great scope to Mrs. Siddons's acting. The revengeful *Montevole*, in this play, is an Italian portrait of strong national verisimilitude.

The only other new part which she performed during this season was *Alicia*, in "Jane Shore."—"Why," it will perhaps be asked, "did she relinquish the comparatively loveable character of *Shore's* wife, for that of the guilty wretch who betrays her?" The only answer I can give is, that, wretch as she is, *Alicia* is an impassioned being; and that none but players can duly estimate the craving of the public for new impressions from performers, or the difficulty of satisfying that avidity. A meritorious actor once told me, that no risk in a new part was so formidable as cloying the public with over-frequency in an old one. A player may recover from experimental damnation; but the world never forgives the infliction of satiety.

## CHAPTER XII.

Season at Drury Lane, 1787-8—Mrs. Siddons appears as *Cordelia*, in "King Lear"—as *Cleonice*, in the "Fate of Sparta"—as *Katherine*, in "Katherine and Petruchio"—as *Dionara*, in *Greatheed's* "Regent"—as *Cleopatra*, in Dryden's "All for Love"—Visits Scotland—Was at Windsor when the King showed the first Symptoms of his mental Malady.

[1787.] During the recess of 1787, Mrs. Siddons found her health so much affected by her efforts in the preceding season, that she forbore her customary visits to the provincial theatres, and spent the greater part of the summer at the hospitable mansion of her friend, Lady Harcourt.

In the autumn she returned to old Drury; but I find her appearing in no new part till she acted *Cordelia*, to the *King Lear* of her brother, John Kemble.

Many are still alive who may remember them in these two characters. Their magnificent acting was always the more ac-

ceptable for being conjoined on the stage ; though, when comparison was instituted, it leaned almost invariably in favour of the sister's genius. In this play, however, I believe I shall not contradict the general recollection of all surviving spectators, when I say that the brother was a more memorable player than the sister. I have certainly, in my own mind, a more vivid recollection of the Kemble's *Lear* than of the Siddons's *Cordelia*. The former, as *Lear*, was unparalleled among all the actors I ever beheld. Kean, with all his powers, I think, failed in the part as a whole. He absolutely lowered the tone of it, at times, to the whine of an aged beggar. Kemble alone was a touchingly pathetic old man, and, at the same time, " *every inch a king.*"\* When he awoke in *Cordelia's* lap, he gave his eyes an expression that seemed *inspired*, strangely blending the fire of a fervid mind with the lost look of age ; and he made imbecility and dotage indescribably affecting.

As far as my own recollection goes, *Cordelia* was not one of the parts in which our great actress made a first-rate impression. Of course, I am now only comparing her with herself. Mrs. Siddons, I also remember, once talked to me of *Cordelia* being a secondary part, which she would not have performed but for the benefit of her brother. This information will possibly surprise some of my readers, who have resorted to the page of Shakspeare rather than to the theatre. " How strange it is," they will say, " that Mrs. Siddons should not have doted on the best of Shakspeare's female creations, and felt herself at home in the pathos and hallowedness of *his Cordelia*." Yes, the original heroine is a noble being, but Mrs. Siddons was not now playing Shakspeare's *Cordelia*. I have my own doubts, indeed, whether the real Shaksperian *Cordelia*, beautiful as the character is, would have given great scope to Mrs. Siddons's powers, as the pious daughter of *Lear* appears in so few scenes of the tragedy. But, be that as it may, she was now playing a part compounded out of Shakspeare's poetry and the verses of Nahum Tate. In this edition of *Lear*, *Cordelia* is made to be in love with *Edgar*, and to receive him as a lover, with his blanket about him, reciting many of the wretched verses of the interpolating poet. I deny not that, in all the unhallowed changes of the tragedy, considerable scope was still left for her talents. The piece, though dese-

\* On the evening of the day that I wrote the above sentence, I went to see, for the first time, Macready as *Lear*. I must own that I missed the *does* *feature*—the splendid eyes of Kemble, in the old king's appearance ; but still Macready's performance of *Lear* is that of a masterly actor.

erated, had not lost all its original glory, “*nor seemed less than Archangel ruined.*” But still, the part of *Cordelia* was spoiled more than that of *Lear*, and to that circumstance I ascribe our great actress’s *seeming* inferiority to her brother on this occasion.

The restorers of our stage, in Charles the Second’s reign, brought forward the tragedy of “*Lear*” as it was originally written; but the public had not taste enough to enjoy it, even with Betterton’s acting. In the leaden reign of King William, it was endured that Nahum Tate, the psalmist, should re-write “*King Lear*,” or, to use his own audacious words, should “*new string the unpolished jewels of Shakspeare.*” He introduced a love-story between *Edgar* and *Cordelia*, and dismissed the audience in good-humour, by making *Lear* and his pious daughter finally triumphant. Addison’s pure taste protested against this change; and Richardson blames it, in his “*Clarissa:*” but still the public were so fond of the love-story, and the reprieve, that Garrick durst only make partial alterations on Tate’s “*Lear*.” He would not venture even to reintroduce the *Fool*, whom Nahum had banished, as if he had wished to have no other fool than himself concerned with the tragedy.

In 1768, the elder Colman brought out “*Lear*,” at Covent Garden, strange to say, unsuccessfully, though he rescued the greater part of it from the profanations of Tate. He threw out the love scenes between *Edgar* and *Cordelia*, but was unhappily of Dr. Johnson’s absurd opinion, that the heroine and her sire could not be dismissed without victory and felicity. With this exception, he adhered pretty fairly to Shakspeare.

The “*King Lear*” that was now brought forward, in January, 1788, I suppose, must have been Garrick’s edition of the play. I make this conjecture, because Kemble was not Manager of Drury Lane until the October of the same year. But, be that as it may, I am sorry to confess that Kemble, when he became manager, continued an edition of “*Lear*” upon the stage exceedingly discreditable to his taste, and retaining a great deal of the trash of Nahum Tate. In that vicious edition of his, both he and Mrs. Siddons habitually acted.

Verily, if Shakspeare be the idol of England, he must be called our molten idol;—we allow him to be cast in so many shapes, and to be adulterated with such base alloy.

On the last night of the same month of January, 1788, Mrs. Siddons had a new part, as *Cleonice*, in the “*Fate of Sparta;*” a tragedy so full of rant that I marvel how she contrived to

keep her audience in a state of gravity. Its authoress, Mrs. Cowley, could be respectable in comedy, but never out of it.

On the 13th of March, Mrs. Siddons performed, for her brother's benefit, certainly not for her own, the part of *Katherine*, to his *Petruchio*.

She had a new part within a week after, March 20, as *Dionara*, in the "Regent," a tragedy, by her friend, Bertie Greatheed, now the representative of that family with whom she had lived at Guy's Cliff. Her partiality for this production was naturally bespoken by her friendship for its author; at the same time, I am happy to find the "Regent" regarded rather favourably by judges more unlikely to be lenient. The *Biographia Britannica* allows it considerable merit.\* Mr. Genest also thinks it respectable, and commends the natural and simple language of its under characters. I knew Mr Greatheed very well. He was a courageous liberal, at a time when liberalism was not so safe as at present; a practical philanthropist, and in every respect an estimable man. *Bonum virum facile dixeris*. But he was not a man of genius.

For her second benefit this season, May 5, Mrs. Siddons performed *Cleopatra*, in Dryden's "All for Love."† Already, I think, her professional history entitles us to regret that she was not oftener in Shakspeare: and who can forget that Shakspeare has given us a far superior tragedy to Dryden's on the same subject? Dryden's *Marc Antony* is a weak voluptuary from the first to last. Not a sentence of manly virtue is ever uttered by him that seems to come from himself; and, whenever he expresses a moral feeling, it seems not to have grown up in his own nature, but to have been planted there by the influence of his friend *Ventidius*, like a flower in a child's garden, only to wither and take no root. Shakspeare's *Antony* is a very different being. When he hears of the death of his first wife, *Fulvia*, his exclamation, "There's a great spirit gone!" and his reflections on his own enthralment by *Cleopatra*, mark the residue of a noble mind. An ordinary wanton could have enslaved Dryden's hero. A queen, a siren, an enchantress, alone, could have entangled the *Marc Antony* of Shakspeare, whose *Cleopatra* is equally superior to Dryden's.

And yet, would Shakspeare's *Cleopatra* have suited Mrs. Siddons's powers? I am pretty sure it would not. The

\* The *Biographia*, however, is wrong in stating that the "Regent" was acted only twice. It ran through twelve nights.

† *Antony*, Kemble; *Ventidius*, Palmer; *Diobella*, Barrymore; *Oe-tavia*, Mrs. Ward.

energy of the heroine, though neither vulgar nor comic, has a meteoric playfulness and a subtle lubricity in the transition of feelings, that accords with no impression which can be recollected from Mrs. Siddons's acting.

A French critic calls Great Britain the island of the idolators of Shakspeare ; yet it so happens, in this same island, that Dryden's "All for Love" has been acted ten times oftener than Shakspeare's "Antony and Cleopatra."

But, because the heroine of the latter drama is a part that probably would not have suited Mrs. Siddons, it by no means follows that she was worthily employed as the *Cleopatra* of the former. If Dryden's idea of confronting the Egyptian queen with the wife of *Antony*, and bringing them almost to a scolding match, were not so injudicious, the part of the Roman matron, *Octavia*, would have been more appropriate to the Siddons. As it was, she never established "*the Siren of the Nile*" among her popular characters.

This was her last appearance at Drury Lane for the season. She left town for Mr. Greatheed's, in Warwickshire, and spent several weeks there with her delighted friends. From thence she proceeded to the northern provincial theatres. By Jackson's account of the Scottish stage, it appears that her profits at Edinburgh were far superior even to Mrs. Jordan's, and that in nine nights they amounted to as many hundred pounds. At the conclusion of her engagement, the Faculty of Advocates presented her with a piece of plate, a massive silver tray, bearing the following inscription :

" TO MRS. SIDDONS,  
AS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RESPECT FOR  
EMINENT VIRTUES,  
AND OF GRATITUDE FOR PLEASURE RECEIVED  
FROM UNRIVALLED TALENTS."

The autumn of this year was memorable for the commencement of that first illness of his majesty George III., by which the regency question was brought into agitation. The reader will perhaps ask, with surprise, what connexion Mrs. Siddons's name could have with the afflicting event of the royal malady. It had only this connexion, that she was the first person who observed in the royal personage grounds to suspect his mental aberration. The king, like all his subjects, thought her talents an ornament to his reign, and he had a profound and cordial regard for her personal character. She was often at Buckingham House and at Windsor. But, when she was on a visit at

the latter palace, his majesty one day handed her a sheet of paper, that was blank all but the signature of his name. She judged too highly both of her sovereign and herself to believe that, in his right mind, he could show such extraordinary conduct; and the event proved the justice of her conclusion. She immediately took the paper to the queen, who was duly grateful for this dignified proof of her discretion.

At this period our great actress was the courted favourite of an intellectual circle, whose acquaintance made her prouder than even the notice of royalty. Often have I heard her boast of the times when every other day she had a note or a visit from Sir Joshua Reynolds, from Mrs. Piozzi, or from Erskine, Burke, Sheridan, or Malone. I fondly hoped to have found among her papers a good many relics of her correspondence with these distinguished contemporaries, but, to my mortification, there were none, with the exception of one or two, which shall be given.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

Season 1788-9—Mrs. Siddons's Health becomes infirm—She meets with a domestic Calamity—“Henry VIII.” is brought out at Drury Lane—Her *Queen Katharine*—She plays *Volumnia*, in the Tragedy of “Coriolanus”—The *Princess*, in Jephson’s “Lombardy;” and Shakespeare’s *Juliet*.

[1788.] AND yet, in those halcyon days of her ripened fame and meridian beauty, I find that her health was beginning to suffer by her professional fatigues; for, though her reputation could not well be augmented, it could not be supported without incessant exertion. The daily papers of this period frequently allude to her illness; and in the season 1788-9, she performed less frequently by twenty nights than in any preceding year, at Drury Lane. It was no trifling indisposition that could make Mrs. Siddons relax one day from her professional duty. Never was there any one more above the littleness of either fancying or feigning indisposition. With a family consisting chiefly of daughters, she was too affectionate a mother not to be anxious for the gains that were to secure their independence; neither was she unambitious of continuing her celebrity. Accordingly, she prided herself on her professional industry. I have heard

her boast that she never once disappointed either a manager or the public ; and that, in point of punctuality, she had always been *an honest actress*.

But her health was tried at this time not only by the toils of her vocation, but by "*the grief that passeth speaking* ;" for, though death had not yet made his greatest ravages in her family, she lost this year a little daughter, in the bloom of infancy.

During this season, however, she assumed two of her most signal new characters. On the 25th of November, 1788, Shakspeare's "*Henry VIII.*" after an absence of half a century, was brought forward at Drury Lane, with costly dresses and decorations, and with studious pains on the part of the managers. Palmer was *King Henry*, John Kemble was *Cromwell*, and Bensley was *Cardinal Wolsey*. Our great actress, as if to show that Dr. Johnson's old words had not slept in her ear, took the part of *Queen Katharine*. This was an era, not only in Mrs. Siddons's history, but in the fortune of the play as an acting piece ; for certainly, in the history of all female performance on the British stage, there is no specific tradition of any excellence at all approaching to hers as *Queen Katharine*.

I cannot help imagining that there was a strong moral resemblance between the historical heroine and her illustrious representative. They were both benevolent, great, simple, and straightforward in their integrity ; strong and sure, but not prompt in intellect ; both religiously humble, yet punctilioseously proud. It is true that Hans Holbein paints Henry's consort, and the old English chroniclers also describe her, as much less beautiful than they would have painted and described Mrs. Siddons ; but who that meets *Queen Katharine*, in Shakspeare, troubles himself about Hans Holbein and the old chroniclers ? We wish and fancy her to be superb ; and we see her visage in her mind.

It seems to be considered as almost certain, that the play of "*Henry VIII.*" was brought out in the reign of Elizabeth, and that it was acted before her majesty by her own command. This fact is remarkable, and, at a first and superficial view, it may seem even astonishing,—when we ask how Anna Boleyn's daughter should have desired to look on the stage-death of Queen Katharine, in connexion with the representation of her own mother, whose tragic fate must have been silently in the mind of every spectator.

I have found it repeatedly remarked, that there is a wonderful boldness and dexterity in Shakspeare's management of this

subject; and his adroitness I can readily recognise. But, with regard to his boldness, we may rest assured that he inserted not one word in the drama which would hazard, much less defy Queen Elizabeth's displeasure: and his address seems to have consisted principally in flattering his royal mistress upon no points where the public opinion could not palpably go with him, and where his plain dealing was not a better compliment to her shrewd mind than the subtlest perversion of facts would have been. For instance, the nation perfectly well knew that Henry's only motive for divorcing Katharine was his love of Anna Boleyn; and Shakspeare makes one of his characters jocosely tell us so. If the poet had hypocritically treated Hal's scruples with respect, Elizabeth would have chidden him for absurd adulation. But Shakspeare keeps Henry VIII. and her mother not only in a true light, but in that exact degree of exposure to the true light which was most favourable to Elizabeth's popularity. Her father is not libelled on the stage. What with a remnant of regard that he shows to Kate, the queen of queens, and his old English bluntness, not unmixed with a certain portion of jocularity, we cannot be said to hate him thoroughly, however secretly we may condemn him; at least, our dislike of him is kept at a moderate temperature. Shakspeare is equally dexterous, in making *Anna Boleyn* gentle and compassionate towards *Queen Katharine*; and I think he plays the courtier a little in contriving to exculpate *Anna* at the expense of *Wolsey*.

But it may be asked if it was not weakening our interest in Elizabeth's mother to make us weep over the heart-broken death of Katharine? I answer, No! for Anna Boleyn's execution was still more fresh in the public recollection than Queen Katharine's death: and the unmerited sufferings of the former could only tend to strengthen in the public breast their conviction of Anna Boleyn having died undeservedly. It is true, Henry VIII. is not libelled in Shakspeare's drama, yet his sickleness is so fully exposed as to make us say to ourselves, if the tyrant could thus atrociously use the noble Katharine, can we harbour the slightest doubts of Anna Boleyn's innocence? Elizabeth, therefore, witnessed in this play scenes that indirectly, but powerfully vindicated her own mother; and, on the day that she saw it represented, there was not in the whole house a more politic player than the royal spectatress.

Here Mrs. Siddons found a part in which she could promise herself continued popularity, even under increasing years. I cannot say, from my own observation, whether she improved

or not in her performance of *Queen Katharine*, but she used to pride herself in having done so in all her great characters ; and I cannot suppose her to have been self-deceived.

I should say something of my remembrance of her *Queen Katharine*, if I had not beside me some remarks that will be incomparably more than a substitute for any that I could offer. They were printed by my friend James Ballantyne, of Edinburgh, and, I have reason to believe, were written by the actor Terry. They have to me the apparent stamp of a stage artist.

“ *Katharine of Arragon*, the wife and the daughter of a king ;—majestic alike in her birth, her demeanour, her virtues, and her understanding ; the ready defender of the oppressed, and the steadfast enemy of the oppressor ;—the dignified assertor of her own honour, and the strict and affectionate guardian of that of others entrusted to her care ;—the kind and benevolent friend of the humble, and the self-corrected, patient, and religious supporter of worldly sufferings and persecutions : such is *Katharine*, as drawn by Shakspeare, and exhibited to the life by Mrs. Siddons.

“ In the chamber-council, met for the examination of the *Duke of Buckingham’s* surveyor, she is first introduced to us as the humane petitioner, on the part of the people, against the ambitious and extortionate rapacity of *Wolsey*, of whose selfish politics she throughout shows herself the undaunted opposer ; and as the advocate of *Buckingham*, against the insidiousness of his persecutor, and the treachery of his surveyor. This is a quiet scene, affording no opportunities for energetic exertions or flashes of effect, but displaying those excellences which Mrs. Siddons alone possesses,—that quiet majesty of deportment, arising from the natural majesty of her form and mind, which imposes reverence and commands subjection ; and that clear and intelligent harmony of unlaboured elocution, which unravels all the intricacies of language, illuminates obscurity, and points and unfolds the precise truth of meaning to every apprehension. This unrivalled excellence was illustrated in every speech of the scene. But we feel a pleasure in recalling particular remembrance to the awful and impressive dignity of appeal,—to the searching solemnity of her tone and manner, when she interrupts the wretched instrument of *Wolsey*, in his tutored charge against his master, *Buckingham* :

‘ If I know you well,  
You were the duke’s surveyor, and lost your office  
On the complaint o’ the tenants. Take good heed

You charge not in your spleen a noble person,  
And spoil your nobler soul. I say, take heed !

The insensibility of brutal apathy, or demoniac determination of evil, could alone have remained unalarmed and unchanged before the still, but tremendous force of her voice and eye, as she uttered these lines.\*

"In the trial scene, the same exquisite truth of elocution marked the sorrowful, affectionate, and dignified address to her husband. But we dwell with the strongest admiration upon the extraordinary sublimity of her feelings and expressions, when *Wolsey* opposes her request of delay until she may have the advice of her friends in Spain. Vexed to the uttermost by the artifices with which her ruin is prosecuted, and touched with indignation at the meanness and injustice of the proceedings, she interrupts *Campeius* with the intention of accusing *Wolsey* of personal enmity towards her, and of refusing him for her judge, and calls, in a resistless tone of command, "Lord Cardinal!" *Campeius*, who has been urging immediate trial, imagines it addressed to him, and comes forward as if to answer. Here Mrs. Siddons exhibited one of those unequalled pieces of acting, by which she assists the barrenness of the text, and fills up the meaning of the scene. Those who have seen it will never forget it: but to those who have not, we feel it impossible to describe the majestic self-correction of the petulance and vexation which, in her perturbed state of mind, she feels at the misapprehension of *Campeius*, and the intelligent expression of countenance and gracious dignity of gesture with which she intimates to him his mistake, and dismisses him again to his seat. And no language can possibly convey a picture of her immediate re-assumption of the fulness of majesty, glowing with scorn, contempt, anger, and the terrific pride of innocence, when she turns round to *Wolsey*, and exclaims, "To you I speak!" Her form seems to expand,

\* I was at Edinburgh one year when she was electrifying the Northern metropolis with many characters, and with none more than this. One of her fellow-performers, Mr. Russell, told me an instance of her power in the part. A poor fellow who played the *Surveyor*, in "Henry VIII." was met by Mr. Russell coming off the stage, having just received the *Queen Katharine's* (Siddons's) rebuke, "You were the duke's surveyor, and lost your office on the complaint o' the tenants." The mimetic and unjust steward was perspiring with agitation. "What is the matter with you?" said Mr. Russell. "The matter!" quoth the other, "that woman plays as if the thing were in earnest. She looked me so through and through with her black eyes, that I would not for the world meet her on the stage again."

and her eye to burn with a fire beyond human. *Wolsey* obeys the summons, and requests to know her pleasure: she proceeds to make her charge and her refusal. And we cannot refrain from quoting the following passages, for the purpose of remarking that the mingled feelings of which they are composed, their natural gradations, their quick and violent transitions, are all unfolded and expressed with such matchless perfection of ease and truth, and in colours so far exceeding in force and brilliancy those of every other performer, that the learned and unlearned, the vulgar and the refined, feel alike the instantaneous conviction of their superiority, and the impossibility of adapting praise expressive of their own conceptions, and adequate to her deserts.

*Wolsey.*

‘Your pleasure, madam?’

*Queen.*

‘Sir!

I am about to weep: but thinking that  
We are a queen, or long have dream'd so,—certain  
The daughter of a king,—my drops of tears  
I'll turn to sparks of fire! ’

“There were none who did not feel the agonies of sympathy when they saw her efforts to suppress the grief to which her woman's nature was yielding,—who did not acknowledge, in her manner, the truth of her assertion of royalty, and who did not experience a portion of that awe which *Wolsey* might be supposed to feel when her ‘sparks of fire’ darted through her ‘drops of tears.’

“Every line of the subsequent reply to *Wolsey*, who entreats her to ‘be patient,’ exhibited the perfection of appropriate expression:

‘I will, when you are humble,—nay, before;  
Or God will punish me. I do believe,  
Induced by potent circumstances, that  
You are mine enemy; and make my challenge  
You shall not be my judge: for it is you  
Have blown this coal betwixt my lord and me,  
Which heaven's dew quench! Therefore, I say again,  
I utterly abhor,—yea, from my soul,  
Refuse you for my judge! whom, yet once more,  
I hold my most malicious foe, and think not  
At all a friend to truth! ’

“The withering poignancy of her scorn, and the deep solemnity of her reproach, made awful by the agitations of her

soul, render vain our attempts either of description or of eulogy.

“ When the wiles of the arrogant politician overpower the simple honesty of her feelings, and ‘ vex her past her patience ;’ and when she quits the court, saying

‘ I will not tarry !—no, nor ever more  
Upon this business my appearance make  
In any of their courts !’

every spectator starts into sympathy with *Henry’s* blunt exclamation, at her departure,

‘ Go thy ways, Kate ;  
Thou art alone the queen of earthly queens !’

“ We are now brought to what we do not hesitate to believe the most entirely faultless specimen of the art that any age ever witnessed : we mean the last scene of *Katharine*’s sickness and approaching death. We are, in general, subjected to severe disappointment by the attempts of art to embody the portraiture of ideal excellence which imagination has previously raised : but, in this instance, its most soaring conceptions are equalled, we will venture to say surpassed, by the extraordinary powers of Mrs. Siddons. Her empire over the regions of tragedy is unlimited ;—her potency of terror and of wo are equal : and the tremendous pencil of Michael Angelo, which we have seen her wield with such force, in *Lady Macbeth*, *Constance*, and others, is here resigned for the sublime and pathetic simplicity of Raphael’s touches,—so saintedly beauteous is the sickness and the grief of *Katharine*.

“ There is one feature of her delineation of the sickness unto death, which struck us as a remarkable indication of the superiority of her observations of nature, and her skill in the representation. Instead of that motionless languor and monotonous imbecility of action and countenance, with which the commonplace stage-pictures of sickness are given, Mrs. Siddons, with a curious perception of truth and nature peculiarly her own, displayed, through her feeble and falling frame, and death-stricken expression of features, that morbid fretfulness of look, that restless desire of changing place and position, which frequently attends our last decay. With impatient solicitude, she sought relief from the irritability of illness by the often shifting her situation in her chair ; having the pillows on which she reposed her head every now and then removed and adjusted ; bending forward, and sustaining herself, while speaking, by the pressure of her hands upon her knees ; and playing,

during discourse, among her drapery, with restless and uneasy fingers: and all this with such delicacy and such effect combined, as gave a most beautiful as well as most affecting portraiture of nature fast approaching to its exit.

“ To select passages from this scene for particular admiration would be idle, where the whole so strongly calls for the revived attention of the mind, to examine and reflect upon the minute and watchful skill by which every part was made to conduce to that wondrous general impression received while witnessing the performance. Yet, perhaps, those little touches which mark and preserve individuality of character start off in the strongest light of remembrance; such as the indignant reproof with which she chides the rude and irreverent entrance of the messenger, and shows that, in her dejected state, ‘she will not lose her wonted greatness;’ and the peculiar moral sweetness and royalty of manner with which she makes her last request:

‘ When I am dead,  
Let me be us’d with honour. Strew me over  
With maiden flowers, that all the world may know  
I was a chaste wife unto my grave!  
Although unqueen’d, inter me like a queen;  
And pay respect to that which I have been.’

“ One additional beauty of her performance remains for us to notice,—the astonishing nicety with which her powers are made gradually to decay from the beginning to the end of the scene; when her anxious directions to the *Lord Campeius* seem to have exhausted her; when ‘her eyes grow dim,’ and her bodily and mental powers but just suffice, as she is supported off, to lay upon her servants the last pathetic and solemn injunctions we have quoted.

“ The oppressive truth of her representation, in this scene, is remarkably indicated by the minds of the audience being always so weighed down with the load of sorrow, tenderness, and respect, that it is not until she is no more seen, and reflection has relieved them from their sensations, that they ever once think of paying the customary tribute of applause, which then cannot be too long and loud: but, in the course of the scene, the heart cannot once yield to, or suffer the usual theatrical sympathy of the hands.”

On the 7th of February following, she played, for the first time, *Volumnia*,\* in Shakspeare’s “Coriolanus,” adapted to

\* *Coriolanus*, Kemble; *Tullus Aufidius*, Wroughton; *Menenius*, Baddely; *Cominius*, J. Aickin; *Tribunes*, Barrymore and Whitfield; *Citizens*, Suet, &c.; *Virgilia*, Mrs. Farmer; *Valeria*, Mrs. Ward.

the stage, with additions from Thomson ! Shakspeare, with additions from Thomson ! With subtractions, they ought surely to have said ; for, much as we may all love the latter poet, what could his drama add to that of Shakspeare ? and, of all Shakspeare's plays, the pure original "Coriolanus," in my humble opinion, needs the smallest alteration for the stage. I know not whether Brinsley Sheridan or John Kemble was the compounder of this mixed piece, as Mrs. Siddons first performed in it, but, as the latter was now the acting manager of Drury Lane, I rather suspect him to have got it up ; and I believe that it was the same that was afterward published from his prompt-book.

So delightful is the impression which I retain of the Kemble's and the Siddons's performances in this tragedy, altered as it was from the noble and true text, and such recollections of their confronted aspects, as *Coriolanus* and *Volunnia*, come across my mind, that I reluctantly criticise the taste of the great actor, in his alterations of Shakspeare. As performers, the brother and sister were perfect samples of the heroic form and of heroic action ; and, while they trod the stage, the delighted spectator was willing to forget that the piece contained those misnamed additions from Thomson. Kemble made *Coriolanus* one of his noblest parts. But, when I calmly compare Kemble's prompt-book tragedy with the text of Shakspeare, I cannot but wonder at his innovations as a stage-compositor.

Thus much, however, may be said in palliation of Kemble's production ; that for the most part he adheres to Shakspeare, and that the liberties which he took with the original were far inferior to those which had been formerly taken with it. It is a fact, surprising as it may seem, that the real Shaksperian "Coriolanus" has rarely, if ever, been acted on the British stage since the Restoration. I pretend to no authority as an inquirer into our theatrical history, but, under eventual correction, I venture to state my belief, that it was never acted genuinely from the year 1660 till the year 1820.

During this long interval, nevertheless, "Coriolanus" was not forgotten. The enlightened public, in 1682, permitted Nahum Tate, the executioner of King David, to *correct* the plays of Shakspeare ; and he laid his hangman hands on "Coriolanus." He made *Valeria* a Prattling and rattling lady. *Aufidius* threatens to violate *Virgilia* before her husband's face. *Nigridius* boasts that he has racked young *Marcius*, the son of *Coriolanus*, and that he had thrown him, with all

his limbs broken, into the arms of *Volumnia*; and she, his grandmother, soon enters, *mad*, with the pretty mangled boy in her arms. This mode of rewriting Shakspeare was, for the time being, called correcting him. We talk of the barbarism of the Russians, because they occasionally take out the image of their patron saint, and correct him soundly, by flogging him for a long continuance of unseasonable weather; but, really, such treatment of Shakspeare was more sacrilegious.

A farther outrage still awaited the same tragedy, when Dennis moulded a portion of it, with wretched matter of his own, into a new piece, which he called "The Invader of his Country." It must be owned, however, that Dennis's drama was never tolerated.

Thomson's "Coriolanus," which appeared in 1748, had at least the merit of being a new and independent tragedy. The elder Sheridan, in 1764, brought out, at Covent Garden, a piece, in which he jumbled together the "Coriolanus" of Shakspeare with that of Thomson. Then, in 1789, came the Kemble edition, in which so much of Thomson's absurdity is still preserved, that the stately *Volumnia* threatens to stab herself.

Mrs. Siddons, in spite of a few departures in her part from that in Shakspeare, was a magnificent *Volumnia*. I transcribe with pleasure the following recollection of her in that part, from a letter of my valued friend, the actor Young.—"I remember her," he says, "coming down the stage in the triumphal entry of her son, *Coriolanus*, when her dumb-show drew plaudits that shook the building. She came alone, marching and beating time to the music; rolling (if that be not too strong a term to describe her motion), from side to side, swelling with the triumph of her son. Such was the intoxication of joy which flashed from her eye, and lit up her whole face, that the effect was irresistible. She seemed to me to reap all the glory of that procession to herself. I could not take my eye from her. *Coriolanus*, banner, and pageant, all went for nothing to me after she had walked to her place."

[1789.] On the 18th of the same month she had a new character, in the *Princess of Jephson's "Law of Lombardy;"* a very moderate tragedy, the story of which is taken from Ariosto. But she was not here destined to show the miracle of drawing sublime acting from indifferent poetry, and the part never became one of her principals.

A still humbler piece taxed her powers soon afterward (March 20th), in the Hon. Mr. John St. John's "Mary Queen

of Scots." Unfortunate Mary ! the historians distract us about her memory, and the bad poets will not let her alone.

It is with something like a startled feeling that I find Mrs. Siddons, for her second benefit this season, choosing the part of Shakspeare's *Juliet*. Fourteen years before, Garrick ought to have brought her out in this character, which would have then completely suited the youthful loveliness of her intelligent physiognomy. *Juliet*, with Mr. Boaden's permission, is not, as he calls her, in his Life of Mrs. Siddons, "*a silly girl*," but a shrewd and precociously strong-minded woman. She is blinded indeed by her love, because the passions, though they reason admirably about the means of being gratified, are miserable logicians as to the consequences of their own gratification. Mrs. Siddons, in her youth, would assuredly have been the best of *Juliet*s ; but how far she played it to perfection at this time, I can only conjecture. She was now thirty-four years of age ; and time and study had stamped her countenance, one would imagine, too strongly for *Juliet*. Yet, Mr. Boaden says, that in her humouring of the *Nurse* there was something of a more genuine playfulness than he had ever heard before. This reminds me of what I have already stated on my own strong recollection, that in the scene of "*Othello*," where she pleaded as *Desdemona* for *Cassio*, there was a fondness, most beautifully familiar, in Mrs. Siddons's acting, which succeeding actresses have generally attempted to imitate. Let it be marked, that, to grant her this power of softening tragedy by a condescension to what might almost be called playfulness, is not to claim for her any genius for broad comedy.

On the whole, I believe, that in performing *Juliet*, in her thirty-fourth year, she played the true woman, wishing to make herself as loveable as possible to the last. Twice in the season she performed the less ambitious task of reciting on the stage a gossamery ode of the Della Cruscan poet, Merry, on the king's recovery.

## CHAPTER XIV.

Mrs. Siddons retires for a Season, but returns after the lapse of a Year  
—Plays *Queen Elisabeth*, in “Richard the Third,” and *Mrs. Oakley*,  
in the “Jealous Wife.”

IT was generally anticipated that John Kemble’s appointment to be the stage-manager of Drury Lane would have strengthened Mrs. Siddons’s connexion with that house; but he had been only a season in office when she retired from it, and would accept of no engagement for the year 1789-90. Mr. Boaden thinks that this secession denoted some degree of misunderstanding with her brother; but there is not the slightest ground for such a suspicion. I know, from the best authority, that she laid the blame of her retirement on nobody but Richard Brinsley Sheridan. That accomplished gentleman still contrived to be the purse-manager of Drury Lane; and to get money out of his hands was known to be a forlorn hope in the stratagetics of dunning. Our actress’s health, though very fragile, still permitted her to perform at some of the provincial theatres; but in these she had less excitement and exertion than on the London stage, on which, I have heard her say, she never entered without nervousness. It was rather too much to suffer the additional fear of non-payment.

In the November, 1789, I find that she was at Bath, and assisted, as the French phrase it, though only as a spectator, at the performance of a tragedy, which may well be called a curiosity in our literature, namely, that of “Earl Godwin,” by Anne Yearsley, a poor woman who literally sold milk from door to door. That the tragedy should be a great or a good one, was hardly to be expected from a mind utterly destitute of culture,—for our heaven-taught ploughman, Burns, was an accomplished scholar in comparison with Anne Yearsley. I have searched in vain in London for a copy of “The Earl of Godwin,” and therefore cannot speak of it from my own perusal; but, from circumstances and the testimony of others, I conclude that it is very indifferent. At the same time, the mere construction of a drama, that could bear to be acted, by

so illiterate a writer, strikes me with the same sort of feeling as when I read of Ferguson, while he was a shepherd's boy, constructing a clock, although it was but an imperfect one. The poor milkwoman's genius is compared to Burns's by Anna Seward, with all the gilt brass of her consequential style ; but it will no bear no comparison. The Bristol poetess's fancy, to judge from her occasional poems, seems to have grown up in the gloom of misery, like vegetation in the damps of a cellar. In one of them, she alludes to a dreadful scene of her real history. She was a married woman ; and, when about to be delivered of her sixth child, she and her babes, and her aged mother, were left without a morsel to eat, and on the brink of perishing. A humane visitant came at last to relieve them. They all revived except her old mother : she could have borne famine a little longer, but the shock of relief instantaneously killed her ; she raised her head to bless their benefactor, and expired.

In the course of this year Mrs. Siddons also visited Birmingham. In that city she one day chanced to be making some purchases in a shop where the busts of distinguished personages were sold. The shopman, unconscious who his customer was, took down a bust of herself, and told her that it was the likeness of the greatest and most beautiful actress that was ever seen in the world. Mrs. Siddons purchased the piece of stucco, with a totally opposite opinion to the shopman's respecting the merit of the sculpture. She thought that though she had never tried modelling, she could make a better likeness of herself than this wretched production ; and from that time modelling in clay became her favourite amusement. This circumstance led her to study statuary ; and I have no doubt was beneficial to her taste in drapery and attitude. At the same time, I distinctly remember her telling me that her predilection for the classic costume was anterior to this period, and that one evening, in the second season of her acting at Drury Lane, when she had dismissed the fashionable curls and lappets, Sir Joshua Reynolds came up to her after the play, and rapturously praised the round apple form which she had given to her head.

In the summer of 1790, Mrs. Siddons went, with her husband, to France, where they placed their daughters, Sarah and Maria, at a boarding-school at Calais. They then made a tour into the Netherlands, as far as Lisle, in which they were accompanied by Miss Wynne, who was afterward Lady Perival.

By solicitation, and promises of punctual remuneration, she was induced to return to Drury Lane at the end of 1790. In welcoming her reappearance, the house was crowded to suffocation, and the tumultuous shouting and clapping lasted for full five minutes.\* The unconfirmed state of her health, however, was obvious to general observation. The *Morning Chronicle* for March 22, 1791, says, that "the preceding evening a most splendid house welcomed the incomparable actress in *Jane Shore*. The languor of indisposition," it is added, "was visible in her countenance; but this languor gave a deeper interest to the illusion, by making it more perfect, for it was suited to the distress of the penitent, and never did we see her sufferings more chastely, more calmly, and more impressively delineated." She had strength to perform only seven nights during the season, and in no new character. On the last of these nights she charitably played for the benefit of the Theatrical Fund. The pit was laid into the boxes, and tickets were sold at a guinea each.

The state of her health disabled her, during the ensuing recess, from acting at any of the provincial theatres. She spent the summer at Newnham Rectory, the abode of her friend, Dr. Whalley,\* and at Guy's Cliff, with the Greatheeds. Towards Christmas she went to Harrowgate in a very serious state of ailment. It was even doubtful, for some weeks, whether she would be able in the spring to rejoin her friends at Old Drury.

In the mean time, those friends were obliged to make a temporary change in their place of acting. The house in Drury Lane was condemned, and pulled down in the summer of 1791. Mr. Genest says, that, though many alterations had been made, no new building had been raised on the spot for 100 years. The new edifice, which has since been burned, was not finished till 1794. In the interim, the company performed at the Opera House, in the Haymarket, or, as it was called, the King's Theatre. The boxes were raised to 6s. and the pit to 3s. 6d.

Sheridan was no lover of tragedy, and, on Mrs. Siddons's late secession, he was accused of having boasted that, by the strength of comedy, Drury Lane would get on without her. His company had undoubtedly great comic force, for it included Bannister, jun., Palmer, Parsons, Moody, and Wewitzer; be-

\* *London Chronicle*, 8th December, 1790.

† Dr. Whalley wrote the "Castle of Montval," a tragedy which was acted several years afterward.

sides the enchanting Mrs. Jordan, and Miss Farren. But it was soon found that all this constellation of gayety would not solace the public for the absent star. Her return for the winter of 1792 was therefore anxiously expected. Her health happily permitted her, on the 21st of January, to act at the Hay-market, where, in the course of the ensuing season, she performed two-and-twenty times, and in sixteen different characters. Among these, however, there was no one that was new to her, excepting that of *Queen Elizabeth*, in "Richard the Third," a part which, even in the original drama, is not of primary interest.

It is a fact not universally known, that the tragedy which was played on all our stages, since the year 1700, till some twelve years ago, was not the text of Shakspeare, but a fabrication got up by Cibber, partly out of the original, partly out of passages from other plays of Shakspeare, and partly out of materials from the brain of Colley himself. It was the fashion in the last century to admire this dramatic patch-work; and both Davies and Garrick commend it warmly. But critical opinion has of late run quite the contrary way; and Cibber is now rated like an intruding cur, for leaving the vermin of his verse in the sacred precincts of Shakspeare.

Before we condemn Cibber, let us conceive, if he had the power of speaking for himself, what he would be likely to allege. The lively old gentleman, I imagine, would say, " You are now pleased to be very angry with me, for what it is the fashion to call my botching of 'Richard the Third'; but, remember, that scarcely any of Shakspeare's tragedies were kept on the stage without material alterations. In the days of Betterton, all the powers of that great actor could not give stage popularity to 'Richard the Third,' as it was written by Shakspeare. I did not create the taste of my time, I only followed and obeyed it. I launched on the stage a composite work, in which I preserved a good deal of the original, and borrowed largely from some other dramas of the divine poet. True it is, I added some of my own composition, which you angrily denominate stuff. But, with all this stuff, my edition of 'Richard the Third' kept possession of the English stage for a hundred and twenty years. Many a writer of the eighteenth century quoted my interpolations as the pure poetry of Shakspeare, nor was it ever detected by one among myriads of his readers; and tens of myriads of spectators have gone home from seeing my fabrication of the tragedy, quoting passages of my stuff, and blessing Providence for adorning these

islands with such a genius as Shakspeare's. In 1741, your immortal Garrick came out at Goodman's Fields ; and which of the copies of the tragedy did he prefer ? Why mine, and not Shakspeare's. The very line which put the first seal upon Garrick's celebrity, by the thunder of applause which followed it, 'Off with his head ! so much for Buckingham !' that line was one of my interpolations. Garrick, Kemble, Cooke, and Kean, gained immense admiration in the tragedy such as I presented it.

"And, after all, when you were determined, some years ago, to have the genuine play of Shakspeare restored to the stage, how did the attempt succeed ? It was acted twice at Covent Garden, and then laid aside."

To speak impartially, I think, if Cibber committed sacrilege on Shakspeare, the British public, for more than a century, was an accomplice after the fact. All this time are we to let Shakespeare himself go scot-free from blame for a tragedy, which has so far a token of unfitness for the stage, that Cibber's alteration could displace it ? But the general necessity for curtailing Shakspeare's tragedies is, in reality, no reproach to him. If his plays had their old and undegenerate audiences, they would never seem too long for representation. They must now be abbreviated, because the play-goer insists on having two dramas in one night.

But the abbreviation of a Shaksperian drama is a task of some difficulty. When "Richard the Third" was restored, in 1821, it was confessed that omissions had been made, and that extraneous matter would still be introduced, in order to cement the parts disjointed by those omissions. But how was this task performed in 1821 ? Mr. Genest attributes the cold reception of the (almost) genuine "Richard the Third" to an actor making a ludicrous exit as the *Bishop of Ely*, and to the public not having been prepared by observations in the newspapers. I suspect that the cause lay deeper ; namely, in the want of the *callida junctura* between omissions, and in the faultiness of the abridgment itself.

Mrs. Siddons made her last appearance this season in the comic part of the "Jealous Wife," *Mrs. Oakley*. I find it generally said, that she played the character *judiciously* ; though between that merit and excellence there is a mighty chasm.

In the personal history of Mrs. Siddons I may notice, that this year she gave, for the last time, her advice to her eldest son, Henry, not to adopt the stage for his profession. Many

a time have I heard him bitterly repent his not having followed her counsel. Henry was educated at the Charter House, and might have been elected, if he had wished it, from thence to the University. But he thought highly of his capacities for acting, and decided on making it his profession. His mother consenting reluctantly, sent him to Paris to study French and to see Le Kain.

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## CHAPTER XV.

**Mrs. Siddons's Letter to Mr. Taylor, on his offer to write her Biography**  
—Re-opening of Drury Lane—An Innovation in the acting of “*Macbeth*”—She acts the *Countess Orsina*, in Lessing’s Tragedy of “*Emilia Galotti*”—*Horatia*, in Whitehead’s “*Roman Father*”—*Elvira*, in Miss Burney’s unfortunate Drama—*Palmira*, in “*Mahomet*”—*Emmeline*, in “*Edgar and Evelina*”—*Roxana*, in “*Alexander the Great*”—*Julia*, in Prince Hoare’s Tragedy of “*Such Things Were*”—*Almeyda*, in the “*Queen of Granada*”—Escapes acting in “*Vortigern*”—She is disappointed in money matters by Sheridan; but returns to Drury Lane, in September, 1796—Takes a new Character in “*Thomson’s Edward and Eleonora*”—Acts *Vitellia*, in Jephson’s “*Conspiracy*”—*Milwood*, in “*George Barnwell*”—*Athenais*, in “*Theodosius; or, the Force of Love*”—*Agnes*, in “*Fatal Curiosity*.”

THE late Mr. John Taylor, author of the facetious story of Monsieur Tonson, was among the most intimate of Mrs. Siddons’s friends, and was at this time one of her most frequent correspondents. As this worthy man’s Recollections of his own Life have been published, and are well known, it will be unnecessary for me to give any particular account of him. He had the most extensive acquaintance, perhaps, of any man of the age. He either knew everybody, or something about everybody. He was without gall; and his harmless pleasantry, his vast fund of anecdote, and obliging disposition, made him more popular than more talented men with less benevolent tempers. I saw much of him in his extreme old age—when he was still entertaining and cheerful; though he now and then complained of neglect from those who had known him in his palmier days, and compared himself, I fear with some justice, to the hare with many friends.

Among the letters of Mrs. Siddons which Mr. Taylor put into my hands, a few months before his death, I find an answer

to one of his own, from which it appears that he had offered to the great actress to be her biographer, but that she declined wearing the additional wreath with which his kind zeal aspired to crown her celebrity.

*"Newnham Rectory, August 5, 1793.*

"Indeed, my dear friend, if you were to write my praises with the pen of men and angels, I should shrink from that celebrity which the partiality of so kind a biographer would confer: for how could I read, without blushes, those accounts of myself, which would be measures of his friendship, not standards of my worthiness. I am content that you should deceive yourself about my talents and my character, because I have an interest, and perhaps a livelier interest than most people, I believe, imagine, for the opinion of those who give themselves the trouble to think of me at all. But my friends in general are very much mistaken in my character. It has pleased God to place me in a situation of great publicity, but my natural disposition inclines me to privacy and retirement; and, though the applause that is the palm of art is necessarily sweet to my sense, yet sweeter is the still small voice of tender relatives and estimable friends. You may, therefore, tell me as much as you please of those talents with which you say I am so miraculously gifted, and I will hear you with pleasure, and pray for a continuance of your illusion. But do not, *I conjure you*, at least till opinion has a little more sanctioned the idea, do not bid all the world gaze, and wonder, and *certainly laugh*, at my yet feeble efforts.

"I am very much obliged to Mrs. Robinson\* for her polite attention in sending me her poems. Pray tell her so, with my compliments. I hope the poor charming woman has quite recovered from her fall. If she is half as amiable as her writings, I shall long for *the possibility* of being acquainted with her. I say the possibility, because one's whole life is one continued sacrifice of inclinations, which, to indulge, however laudable or innocent, would draw down the malice and reproach of those prudent people who never do ill, 'but feed, and sleep, and do observances to the stale ritual of quaint ceremony.' The charming and beautiful Mrs. Robinson! I pity her from the bottom of my soul!

"Pray go and take Betsy to Marlborough-street, to see my bust of my little son George. I could have done it better, but

\* Mrs. Mary Robinson, the well-known novelist and poetess.

for the extreme heat of the weather, which made the clay crack and dry too fast. Adieu.

“Your affectionate friend,

“S. SIDDONS.

“John Taylor, Esq.

“10 Hatton Garden, London.”

In the following spring she writes thus to her friend Lady Harcourt:

“April 11, 1794.

“\* \* \* \* \* Our new theatre is the most beautiful that imagination can paint. We open it with “Macbeth” on Easter Monday. I am told that the banquet is a thing to go and see of itself. The scenes and dresses all new, and as superb and characteristic as it is possible to make them. You cannot conceive what I feel at the prospect of playing there. I dare say I shall be so nervous as scarcely to be able to make myself heard in the first scene.

“S. SIDDONS.”

In point of fact, the new house at Drury Lane had been opened with a concert of sacred music, on the 12th of March, though there was no regular dramatic performance till the 21st of April, when “Macbeth” was played.\*

An occasional prologue and epilogue were spoken by John Kemble and Miss Farren; a lake of real water was exhibited in the scenery; and the audience were told that an iron curtain was in preparation. Thus far matters were judiciously accommodated to the public love of water and dread of fire. But an innovation was made in the performance of “Macbeth,” about the absurdity of which I am surprised that there should ever have been two opinions. The ghost of *Banquo* was omitted in the banquet-scene; and thus the audience, like the guests of *Macbeth*, seeing only an empty chair, were forced to conjure up the form of the spectral intruder by the force of their own imaginations. This idea was suggested to Kemble by some verses of the poet Edward Lloyd. It was a mere crotchet, and a pernicious departure from the ancient custom.

\* The parts were cast as follows: *Macbeth*, John Kemble; *Banquo*, Wroughton; *Macduff*, Palmer; *Malcolm*, Charles Kemble (his first appearance); *Duncan*, Bensley; *Rosse*, Barrymore; *Lady Macbeth*, Mrs. Siddons; *Hecate*, Bannister; *Witches*, Moody, Dodd, and Suett.

'There was no rationality in depriving the spectator of a sight of *Banquo's* ghost, merely because the company at *Macbeth's* table are not supposed to see it. But we are not *Macbeth's* guests? We are no more a part of their company than we are a part of the scenes or the scene-shifters. We are the poet's guests, invited to see "*Macbeth*;" to see what he sees, and to feel what he feels, caring comparatively nothing about the guests. I may be told, perhaps, that, according to this reasoning, we ought to see the dagger in the air that floats before *Macbeth*. But the visionary appearance of an inanimate object and of a human being are by no means parallel cases. The stage-spectre of a dagger would be ludicrous; but not so is the stage-spectre of a man appearing to his murderer. Superstition sanctions the latter representation: and as to the alleged inconsistency of *Banquo's* ghost being visible to us while it is unseen by the guests at the banquet, the argument amounts to nothing. If we judge by sheer reason, no doubt we must banish ghosts from the stage altogether; but, if we regulate our fancy by the laws of superstition, we shall find that spectres are privileged to be visible to whom they will: so that the exclusion of *Banquo*, on this occasion, was a violation of the spiritual peerage of the drama, an outrage on the rights of ghosts,—and a worthier spectre than *Banquo's* never trod the stage.

On the 25th of July, this year, Mrs. Siddons bore her youngest daughter, Cecilia, the only one of her daughters who survived her. Though she doted on her son George, she had to part with him at an early period of his life, when he went to seek his fortune in India; and she never embraced him again but in his children. Cecilia lived to be the companion and solace of her later years. She is now the wife of Mr. G. Combe, of Edinburgh. In the autumn, Mrs. Siddons writes thus to a friend:

"London, September 11, 1794.

"My whole family are gone to Margate, whither I am going also; and nothing would make it tolerable to me, but that my husband and daughters are delighted with the prospect before them. I wish they could go and enjoy themselves there, and leave me the comfort and pleasure of remaining in my own convenient house, and taking care of my baby. But I am every day more and more convinced that half the world live for themselves, and the other half for the comfort of the former. At least, this I am sure of, that I have had no will of my own

since I remember; and indeed, to be just, I fancy I should have little delight in so selfish an existence.

“Yours,

“S. S.”

She returned to Drury Lane at the customary time, but acted no new part till she appeared as the *Countess Orsina*, in the play of “*Emilia Galotti*,” translated from Lessing. This tragedy never took on the English stage, and had a run of only three nights. Its story has a palpable resemblance to that of *Virginia*, in *Livy*; and *Odoarto Gallotti*, the father of the heroine *Emilia*, puts the young lady to death, at her own suggestion, when her virtue is in danger from the tyrant, *Cвест Appiani*, who is the counterpart of the Roman decemvir. But the catastrophe has a gratuitous over-tinge of German horror, for *Emilia*’s danger is nothing so desperate as *Virginia*’s, and, by the fairest laws of dramatic probability, she ought to have been saved.

The part of *Horatia*, in Whitehead’s “*Roman Father*,” was her next new trial; and certainly that revolting story, with its languid dialogue, was as unworthy of her powers as the former tragedy. Yet, if the daily critics may be trusted, both Kemble and his sister produced effects in acting that could not have been anticipated from reading the play. In the climax of opprobrium which *Horatia* casts upon her brother, Mrs. Siddons threw an emphasis on the word *Roman*, that was felt most powerfully.

The next piece in which Mrs. Siddons had a new character, was the production of an authoress so justly celebrated that I am reluctant to mention its untoward fate; but the fact of our great actress having, for once in her life, died a stage-death amid general laughter, is an event in her history too remarkable to be omitted. On the 21st of March, 1795, a tragedy, called “*Edwy and Elgiva*,” written by Miss Burney, afterward Madam D’Arblay, was produced at Drury Lane. “We are sorry,” says the *London Chronicle*, the following day, “that we cannot congratulate the fair authoress on the success of her first dramatic essay: for even the benedictions of the three bishops, whom she chose for her heroes, were not able to procure the salvation of it;—a circumstance which will probably induce her hereafter to employ something more than spiritual aid in support of a temporal cause.”

Miss Burney was peculiarly unfortunate in bringing bishops into her tragedy. At that time there was a liquor much in popular use, called *Bishop*: it was a sort of negus or punch, I

believe, though the origin of its name I must leave more learned antiquaries to determine. But, be that as it may, when jolly fellows met at a tavern, the first order to the waiter was to bring in the *Bishop*. Unacquainted with the language of taverns, Miss Burney made her king exclaim, in an early scene, “*Bring in the Bishop!*” and the summons filled the audience with as much hilarity as if they had partaken of the exhilarating liquor. They continued in the best possible humour throughout the piece. The dying scene made them still more jocose, when a passing stranger proposed, in a tragic tone, to carry the expiring heroine to the other side of the hedge. This hedge, though supposed to be situated remotely from any dwelling, nevertheless, proved to be a very accommodating retreat; for, in a few minutes afterward, the wounded lady was brought from behind it, on an elegant couch, and, after dying in the presence of her husband, was removed once more to the back of the hedge. The solemn accents of the Siddons herself were not a match for this ludicrous circumstance, and she was carried off amid roars of mirth.

She made her last appearance for the season as *Palmira*, in “*Mahomet the Impostor*,” an indifferent tragedy of Voltaire’s, translated by Miller. She never repeated the character. After “*Mahomet*,” a little piece called “*Edgar and Emmeline*,” attributed to Hawkesworth, and rather pleasing, was revived the same night; and she played the part of *Emmeline*, in which Mrs. Yates had been often admired. How it fared with Mrs. Siddons on this occasion, I know not; but, in a two-act fairy tale, our great actress could scarcely be at home; and, indeed, the same may be said of all her new characters during the season.

In the ensuing season, at Drury Lane, she took a new character, as *Roxana*, in the tragedy of “*Alexander the Great*.” I never saw her performance of this part; but, from the impressions which she made, as *Athenais* and *Aspasia*, I can well imagine her to have been great in *Roxana*. The poetry of Lee, she once told me, had a much more frequent capability for stage effect than a mere reader would be apt to infer, from the superabundance of the poet’s extravagance.

During this season she performed only two other new characters, namely, *Almeyda*, in the “*Queen of Granada*,” by Miss Lee,\* and *Julia*, in Prince Hoare’s tragedy of “*Such Things*

\* The “*Queen of Granada*” was acted at Drury Lane, April 20, 1796. Parts: *Abdallah*, Regent of Granada, and uncle to *Almeyda*, *Palmer*;

Were."\* The writer of the former play may be said, like almost all our best novelists, to have been unsuccessful in the drama ; a fact which the prince of narrative fiction, Sir Walter Scott, has himself explained on philosophical principles. But, though Miss Lee's tragedy has never, to my knowledge, been revived in London since that season, it was respectfully received, and even applauded. Nor, on perusing it, can I perceive why it should not be more popular than many tragedies that keep possession of the stage.

The other piece, by Mr. Hoare, was founded on the well-known story of General Kirke's atrocity. When brought out at Bath, in 1788, it had a run of eight nights, but it was not called for a second time at Drury Lane ; nor was it ever printed. Its author was a man of sense and modesty ; and, perhaps, showed both of these qualities in keeping his tragedy from the press.

I am happy to find our great actress's name unconnected with the representation of that infamous bubble, "The Vortigern" of young Ireland, which it was attempted this year to pass off for a play of Shakspeare's. Sheridan launched this imposture on the stage of Drury Lane, on the 2d of April, 1796. Among its dupes there were, undoubtedly, some men of notoriety ; but the list of them included no individual whose judgment carried very high authority. The most respectable of the believers was Dr. Parr, who, with all his learning, was in many respects a simpleton : another was John Pinkerton, who, with a little learning, was a great charlatan : and a third was George Chalmers, who, with no learning at all, was equally destitute of taste. That Sheridan believed the stuff of "Vortigern" to be authentic is not to be credited. His only folly consisted in dreaming that the public could be so grossly deceived.

Mrs. Siddons was not forced, like her unwilling brother, into the representation of this "solemn mockery." Though I know not how she excused herself, it appears that she was at one time enjoined to take the part of *Rowena*, and was actually

*Orasmyne*, his son, Wroughton ; *Alonzo*, son to *Ramirez*, Kemble ; *Hamer* (Captain of the Moorish Guard), C. Kemble ; *Almeyda*, Mrs. Siddons ; *Victoria*, Mrs. Powell. It was acted five times.

\* "Julia, or Such Things Were," was acted May 2, for Mrs. Siddons's benefit.

Parts : *Edward Clifford*, Kemble ; *Dudley*, Wroughton ; *Duke of Monmouth*, C. Kemble ; *General Kirke*, Caulfield ; *Montague*, Whitfield ; *Allan*, J. Aickin ; *Julia*, Mrs. Siddons.

employed in committing it to memory. To that circumstance she alludes in the following letter :

“ *London, March, 1796.* ”

“ **MY DEAR FRIEND,**

“ One would think I had already furnished conjectures and lies sufficient for public gossip ; but now the people here begin again with me. They say that I am mad, and that *that* is the reason of my confinement. I should laugh at this rumour were it not for the sake of my children, to whom it may not be very advantageous to be supposed to inherit so dreadful a malady ; and this consideration, I am almost ashamed to own, has made me seriously unhappy. However, I really believe I am in my sober senses, and most heartily do I now wish myself with you at dear Streatham, where I could, as usual, forget all the pains and torments of illness and the world. But I fear I have now no chance for such happiness.

“ All sensible persons are convinced that ‘ Vortigern’ is a most audacious imposter. If he be not, I can only say that Shakspeare’s writings are more unequal than those of any other man. I am studying for ‘ Vortigern’ and ‘ Almeyda ;’ and only scrawl these few lines, for fear you should have been frightened at some story of my biting or barking. With love to all around you, I am your affectionate

“ **To Mrs. Piossi.** ”

“ **S. SIDDONS.** ”

Though Sheridan could not cheat the town into “ Vortigern,” he contrived to disappoint Mrs. Siddons out of all her profits during the season. Shortly after the recess, she writes thus to a friend :

“ *May, 1796.* ”

“ Here I am, sitting close in a little dark room, in a little wretched inn, in a little poking village called Newport Pagnell. I am on my way to Manchester, where I am to act for a fortnight ; from whence I am to be whirled to Liverpool, there to do the same. From thence I skim away to York and Leeds : and then, when Drury Lane opens—who can tell ? for it depends upon Mr. Sheridan, who is uncertainty personified. *I have got no money from him yet* ; and all my last benefit, a very great one, was swept into his treasury ; nor have I seen a shilling of it. Mr. Siddons has made an appointment to meet him to-day at Hammersley’s. As I came away very early, I don’t know the result of the conference ; but, unless things are settled

to Mr. Siddons's satisfaction, he is determined to put the affair into his lawyer's hands.

“Yours, ever truly,

“S. SIDDONS”

A variety of circumstances, among which the *personified uncertainty* of Sheridan as to money matters was the most intolerable, now induced John Kemble to resign his office of manager; and, in September, 1796, he was succeeded by Wroughton. Wroughton was the friend of Mrs. Jordan; and it was an article in his stage-creed that the public might be entertained much more effectively on comedy than on the costlier pomp of tragedy; so that his accession was regarded as an omen that 'Thalia had conquered Melpomene at Drury Lane; or, in other words, that Mrs. Siddons was to retire, and Mrs. Jordan to remain as the chief genius of that theatre. Sheridan, however, knew better than to hazard such an experiment; and, in spite of unsettled arrears, he had the address to bring back Mrs. Siddons for the ensuing season. She played on the 22d of September, for the benefit of the veteran Bensley, on the night of his farewell appearance on the stage.

[Oct. 22, 1796.] An attempt was made to give novelty to Mrs. Siddons's attraction, by assigning her the part of the heroine in Thomson's “Edward and Eleanora;” and Kemble, though no longer manager, played the *King*.\* But the dulness of the tragedy proved an overmatch for both their powers. Kemble, on this occasion, was uncommonly sombreous; and even his sister was thought saturnine. The only relief that was given to the tedium of the piece was the introduction of the babes, in their imperial frocks and long coating; when, after being danced in the arms of attendants, they are handed into the bed of their (supposed to be) dying mother. The little darlings affected the house,—but it was with laughter. *It was acted but once.*

On the 15th of November she acted *Vitellia*, in “The Conspiracy;” a tragedy attributed to Jephson;† of which, as it was never printed, I can say nothing from perusal. But I know that on the third, if not on the second, night of its representation, it obtained only an empty house. “Last night,” says the *Public Advertiser* for November 18, 1796, “the Sid-

\* *King Edward*, John Kemble; *Selim*, Palmer; *Theald*, Caulfield; *Gloucester*, Whitfield; *Eleonora*, Mrs. Siddons; *Daraza*, Mrs. Powell.

† Kemble acted *Sextus*, and Palmer *Titus*.

dons and the Kemble, at Drury Lane, acted to vacancy: the hollow sound of their voices was the most dreary thing in the world."

All this time Mrs. Siddons had no occasion to alter her opinion of Sheridan, unless experience had taught her that *Mr. Uncertainty Personified* might be always surely counted on as a defaulter. On the 9th of November, she writes thus to a friend: "I am, as you may observe, acting again: but how much difficulty to get my money! Sheridan is certainly the greatest phenomenon that Nature has produced for centuries. Our theatre is going on, to the astonishment of everybody. Very few of the actors are paid, and all are vowing to withdraw themselves: yet still we go on. Sheridan is certainly omnipotent.

"Yours, &c.

"S. S."

Physicians are known, in certain cases, to prescribe change of air for their patients *unconditionally*; that is, if the invalid cannot be taken to a better atmosphere, they advise his removal even to a worse. In like manner, players allege that the health of their popularity compels them often to leave their best characters, and to range through inferior ones, for the sake of novelty and variety. In this pursuit we have but too often seen our great actress trying "*change of air*:" though probably less from her own wishes than in obedience to the prescription of the manager; and she had now sojourned for a season or two in the most vapid regions of the drama.

In the course of the ensuing year, I am gratified to find her drawing fresh parts—not from insipid tragedies—but from the masterly plays of Lillo. From an habitual partiality for this singular dramatist, the result of early and strong impressions upon my own mind, I was on the point of expressing unqualified enthusiasm at the idea of Mrs. Siddons's genius being employed in the representation of his works; but a moment's reflection reminds me, that our early prepossessions are a sort of gnomes and sylphs which invisibly govern the human mind, often in defiance of taste and judgment, and are therefore not to be rashly trusted. Lillo, I am aware, is a painter of truth, who carries its dreadful realities beyond the boundaries of poetical pleasure. At the acting of one of his pieces, "*Arden of Feversham*," the audience were so moved that they got up and stopped the representation; nor could they be appeased till some one reminded them that they were looking only at a play. I must, therefore, be moderate in speaking of

Lillo. To be sure, when I first read him, and found, to my unbounded satisfaction, that with a fire-side tragedy, and without either a king, or a grandee, or a ghost, he could move,—zy, and master,—the heart, I thought him a greater genius than even Shakspeare. But, renouncing all that exaggeration, I still cannot consent to call him less than a potent writer. He is so masculine, so stanch, so much in earnest with his subject, that when I compare him with the bulk of tragedy-makers, they seem to be only playing at their art like children, while he, to use Ben Jonson's phrase, "*writes all like a man.*"

It was suggested to Mrs. Siddons that it would be of service to Charles Kemble to be brought forward in the character of *George Barnwell*.\* Mrs. Siddons asked Miss Pope, seemingly by way of conversation, if she had ever played *Lucy*, in that tragedy. The other said that she never had played the part, nor ever would play it; but added, in joke, that if Mrs. Siddons would be *Millwood*, she would consent to be *Lucy*. When the part was sent to Miss Pope, she returned it to the prompter, with an angry note; but sent back for it, with an apology, when she learned that her illustrious friend was really to play *Millwood*.

"*George Barnwell, or the London Merchant,*" was first brought out at Drury Lane in 1731. It drew crowded houses. Pope, when he saw it represented, gave it high and almost unqualified praise. Many persons, on the first night, had bought the old ballad of "*George Barnwell*," with an intent to make a ludicrous comparison between that and the new play; but they found themselves so affected by the tragedy, that they threw away the ballads and took to their handkerchiefs.†

\* Nov. 28, 1796. *George Barnwell*, C. Kemble; *Thorowgood*, J. Aickin; *Trueman*, Holland; *Millwood*, Mrs. Siddons; *Maria*, Miss Miller; *Lucy*, Miss Pope.

† Mr. Genest, in his "Account of the English Stage," says, "In the first edition of this tragedy, the last act consists of eleven scenes. The tenth ends with *George Barnwell* going off to execution. The eleventh scene is short. *Trueman*, *Blunt*, and *Lucy* enter: the last says that *Millwood* goes to death with horror, loathing life, and yet afraid to die. Between these two scenes, Lillo afterward inserted another, as the place of execution, with the gallows at the further end of the stage. This scene, though omitted in the modern theatres, was probably acted for seven years, and ought never to have been laid aside."

"Dr. Percy printed the old ballad in his collection; he observes, 'The Ballad was printed as early as the middle of the 17th century. The tragical narrative seems to relate a real fact, but when it happened I have not been able to discover.'"—*Genest*, vol. ii. p. 296.

The part of *Athenais*, in the "Force of Love," which she first performed on the 20th of January, 1797,\* gave her not only the attractiveness of a new character, but fair scope for the tenderness and force of her acting. She liked this part much, and she told me that she had played it with great popularity. The name of the piece reminds me of an incident that gave me cause at once to be grateful for her good-nature, and to admire the tenacity of her memory, and the beauty of her recitation. One day, forgetting that she had ever played in any of Lee's dramas, and, what was worse, forgetting the merit of his masterpiece, "Theodosius," I talked contemptuously of the crack-brained Nathaniel. In justice, I deserved a rebuke, if it had been only for speaking at random of dramatic poetry in the Siddons's presence. But it was a part of her benign character, so little understood but by those who knew her intimately, to argue unassumingly, even on the subjects which she best understood; and she answered my uncharitable-ness towards Lee more effectively than by censure. She dis-coursed on the merits of his "Theodosius;" drew a brief and clear sketch of the story, and quoted, as fluently as if she had been reading the play, from the speeches of all its characters. So charming a commentary on dramatic poetry I never heard, nor shall ever hear. It was a higher treat, if any thing could be so, than even her subsequent readings of tragedy,—to be thus familiarly instructed, under her own roof, and with her own lips, by the Tragic Muse. Her looks and her voice were, at that time, still perfect; and, though not a young woman, yet the womanish sympathy which she evidently felt for *Athenais'* sorrows, made her seem much younger than she was. The noble being never seemed to me so feminine and so natural as on this occasion.

Her success in her next new character was still more striking. On the 3d of February she played *Arpasia*, in "Tamerlane,"† a tragedy by Rowe, which, though it be chargeable with declamation, has some passages of a high tone, and an underplot that is strongly affecting. Mrs. Siddons, at least, thought so; for she wrought herself up in the character to a degree of agitation that was perilous almost to her life. The lover of *Arpasia* (*Moneses*) is brought in, in the fifth act, to be strangled by mutes. *Arpasia* says,—

\* *Varanes*, J. Kemble; *Theodosius*, Barrymore; *Marcian*, Whitfield; *Leontine*, J. Aickin; *Athenais*, Mrs. Siddons; *Pulcheria*, Mrs. Powell.

† *Tamerlane*, Palmer; *Bajazet*, Kemble; *Moneses*, Barrymore; *Axalla*, Campbell; *Arpasia*, Mrs. Siddons; *Selima*, Mrs. Powell.

" Think ere we part."

*Moneses.*

— " Of what ?"

*Arpasia.*

" Of something soft,  
Tender, and kind—of something wondrous sad.  
Oh ! my full soul !"

*Moneses.*

" My tongue is at a loss.  
Thoughts crowd so fast,—thy name is all I've left.  
My kindest, truest, dearest, best Arpasia."

[*The Mutes struggle with him.*

*Arpasia.*

" I have a thousand, thousand things to utter—  
A thousand more to hear yet—barbarous villains !  
Give me a minute. Speak to me, Moneses."

*Moneses.*

" Speak to thee !—'tis the business of my life.  
'Tis all the use I have for vital air.—  
Stand off, ye slaves !—To tell thee that my heart  
Is full of thee ; that even at this dread moment  
My fond eyes gaze with joy and rapture on thee.  
Angels, and light itself, are not so fair."

*Enter BAJAZET, KALY, and Attendantis.*

*Bajazet.*

" Ha ! wherefore lives this dog ? Be quick, ye slaves !  
And rid me of my pain."

*Moneses.*

" For only death, and the last night,  
Can shut out my Arpasia."

[*The Mutes strangle Moneses.*

*Arpasia.*

" Oh dismal !—'tis not to be borne ! Ye moralists !  
Ye talkers ! what are all your precepts now ?  
Patience ! Distraction ! Blast the tyrant ! blast him,  
Avenging lightnings—Snatch him hence, ye fiends—  
Love ! Death ! Moneses !"—

After these words, it was Mrs. Siddons's part to feign a swoon, but she swooned in earnest. Clutching her drapery

with convulsive fingers, she fell back so that her head was heard striking the stage, and her limbs were exposed, which at once made it palpable to the spectator that her fall was neither studied nor voluntary. In a moment there was a rush from the pit and boxes to inquire for her on the stage. It was long before she recovered from the fainting fit.

Palmer, for his benefit this season, got up a tragedy called "The Queen of Carthage," in which Mrs. Siddons performed the part of *Dido*. I have never been able to get a sight of this piece. It was printed, but the publication of it, according to the *Biographia Dramatica*, was stopped by the friends of its deceased author, Joseph Reed.\* The son of the author, nevertheless, gave Palmer 100*l.* for reviving it, and Mrs. Siddons 50*l.* to buy a new dress.

When she acted *Millwood*, in "George Barnwell," Mrs. Siddons was generally alleged to have condescended to a part beneath her dignity. But, on the 2d of May, her performance of *Agnes*, in Lillo's "Fatal Curiosity," was reckoned among her most wonderful exhibitions. An instance of her effect in that character was related to me by Mr. Young the actor, who had it from a spectator of her performance on that very night. The individual to whom I allude is Mr. Crabbe Robinson, a gentleman of the bar, and a scholar well known in the world of literature. He was a young man at the time, but he since states that in the course of a long life, he never felt such an impression from acting. When Mrs. Siddons, as *Agnes*, was asked by *Old Wilmot* how they should support themselves, and when she produced the jewels of their unknown son, giving a remote hint at the idea of murdering him, she crouched and slid up to *Wilmot* with an expression in her face that made the flesh of the spectator creep. Mr. Robinson said that from that moment his respiration grew difficult, and in a few minutes he lost all command of himself. When the murder-scene approached, he laughed aloud, and there was a general cry in the pit to turn him out. The process of his ejection was even begun, and he had received some harsh treatment, when a humane woman interposed, who saw and explained his real condition. He was in strong hysterics.

At the close of that same evening, Mrs. Siddons took a formal farewell for the season 1796-7, during which she acted *Jane Shore* twice.

\* It was first acted at Drury Lane in 1767, with a Prologue by Garrick.

## CHAPTER XVI.

Mrs. Siddons performs *Mrs. Haller*, in "The Stranger"—Loses her Daughter *Maria*—Plays *Miranda*, in a piece by Mr. Boaden; and the *Countess*, in Dr. Whalley's "Castle of Montval"—Two Letters of Miss Seward.

DRURY LANE Theatre opened again, as usual, in September; and, during the season 1797-8, Mrs. Siddons performed more than forty times. She appeared, however, only in two new parts. One of these was the grave and gentle *Julia*, in Sheridan's "Rivals," which, though a character in comedy, is not a comic one. The other was *Mrs. Haller*, in "The Stranger," which she performed, at intervals, six-and-twenty times in the course of four months.

This play, which, as every one knows, is of German origin, has strong characteristics of its native country; the feelings and taste of which Kotzebue, as a writer, represents perhaps more faithfully than a certain portion of his own countrymen are disposed to allow. The refined Germans affect to deny that Kotzebue is an esteemed writer in their own language. A classic writer he may not be, but he is nevertheless a popular author; and his works have contributed to the popularity of German literature. I grant that he is coarse and crude, and that the sublime and the ridiculous, in his fancy, have a great tendency, like the serpent's head and tail, to coil together; but it seems to me that he has more genius and less immorality than his hypercritics on either side of the Baltic have been disposed to allow him.

The celebrated A. W. Schlegel has been very severe upon Kotzebue. In his Dramatic Lectures he denounces "The Stranger" as an absolutely immoral drama; and he has promulgated this humane law in stage ethics, that when a poor woman has once tarnished her character, she has nothing left for it but to die. She may be as penitent as she pleases—the more so the better. If her husband forgives her, she may be "a woman killed with kindness"—but die she must; and, if the author and his audience, according to Schlegel, allow her to live out the fifth act, they are accessories after the fact to her criminality. If I were not treating this matter lightly, I

could prove, I think, from the Bible itself, that this doctrine is not scriptural, and that it would be more Christian-like to bid the penitent "go and sin no more." But I am afraid that the stagyrite, Augustus Wilhelm Schlegel, wrote this diatribe on Kotzebue when he was under the influence of no very charitable feelings ; for the dramatist hated the critic, and there was no love lost between them.

Our English moralists in general took up the subject, with a sweeping condemnation of the character and literature of the nation from which the play of "The Stranger" had come, and those were the loudest in the outcry who were least acquainted with the honest Germans—a people who, in kindness of heart and domestic morality, yield to none on the face of the earth : always, of course, excepting ourselves. The true Englishman of that day, insulated by war, and inflamed by prejudices, thought it a part of his patriotism to hate and despise other countries ; and he grew as fierce as an old bull at the apprehension of the Germans corrupting the purity of his taste and the innocence of his morals. Vehement was the outcry against Schiller for investing *Charles de Moore* with tragic honours ; and care was taken to prevent the tragedy of "The Robbers" from being acted, in the very theatres that had echoed applauses to *Macheath*. This prohibition, co-operating, it may be supposed, with the enclosure of commons, and our improvements in police, happily prevented Schiller's Muse from augmenting our highway robberies.

Above all, the immaculate Londoners were bitter in their complaints against the seductive influence of this sentimental drama, "The Stranger." "What are *double entendres*," says Mr. Boaden,\* "to that immorality which shocks us by no external signs, but insinuates itself into the bosom entirely, without defence, and in the disguise of sensibility." In short, all true choleric English patriots denounced translations from the German as so many seeds of our own demoralization. "The characters of Charlotte and Werter," they used to say, "what are they but printed apologies for extra-connubial attachment ? Then we got from Germany *Charles de Moore*, glorifying robbery, and tempting our sons from the counting-house to Bagshot-heath. But what is even that to 'The Stranger' inculcating the *possibility* that a married woman's elopement may be forgiven, and that she may make it up, after all, with her husband, with no more ado than if she had given him a

\* *Life of Mrs. Siddons*, Vol. II.

snappish answer? What is to become of us after this sentimental abrogation of the seventh commandment? The time is approaching when not a child in England will have its head patted by its legitimate father."

So said the moralizers in general; but Mr. Boaden went farther, for he pronounced the conjugal virtue of England to be already irremediably gone. "I consider," says my sage brother biographer, "*'The Stranger' as a noble ruin, marking the desolation of our domestic manners.*" Under these awful apprehensions, the Londoners most consistently proved the seductiveness of the play by rushing in multitudes to see it; and they so crammed the house, that their ribs were, not metaphorically speaking, but corporeally endangered.

After such alarms have been rung about the immorality of "*The Stranger*," I am almost afraid to offer the most qualified opinion. But though I think of it, as of "*The Fair Penitent*," that it is not the most advisable subject for the stage, I cannot see that it inculcates a demoralizing doctrine. *Haller* takes back his wife, with a virtual confession that his conduct is not in accordance with, but in exception to, the general law of treatment that is due to conjugal infidelity. Besides, we know not in what exact situation he restores her to his future protection. "*The Stranger*" has been naturalized among us for the third part of a century; and I suspect that, upon the whole, he has left our conjugal morals just about as pure as he found them.

This play was given out as a translation by a Mr. Thomson, but the greater part of it, as it was acted, was most probably written by Sheridan. Indeed he said, in the hearing of my friend Samuel Rogers, that he wrote every word of it.\* One part of it, however, he openly avowed, namely, the song, "*I have a silent sorrow here*;" which, if not unparalleled in its own merit, is at least so in its parody.

Mrs. Siddons's performance of the part of *Mrs. Haller* was the most delicate and judicious that can be imagined. She showed what the poet clearly intended us to feel, namely, that the reconciliation was not a conclusion anticipated as a matter of reason or principle by either party, but a burst of nature, overwhelming all abstracted feelings of pride and considerations of stern propriety. She therefore sustained the part with tearless but touching self-command till the end of the very last scene, denoting that she had neither hope nor wish, beyond a

\* This is noticed in Moore's Life of Sheridan.

promise from her husband, that he would not hate her. All other actresses of the part let fall their tears too soon ; and, in the shower of their grief, dimmed to us that only redeeming light in which we can view *Mrs. Haller*. Though a penitent woman, she is conscious that she has no claim to more than her husband's dry-eyed forgiveness, and is therefore aware that she has no right, in their trying interview, to affect him with voluntary demonstrations of her sensibility. Mrs. Siddons accordingly conducted herself with a reserve and calmness that threw pride into humility ; and thus, by contrast, made the effect of her agitation in the last scene undescribable.

In her personal history, this year was not one of the happiest. Early in the course of it she writes to a friend :

“ *Jan. 7, 1798.* ”

“ I can get no money from the theatre. My precious two thousand pounds are swallowed in that drowning gulf, from whom no plea of right or justice can save its victims.”

By the “ drowning ” gulf, Mrs. Siddons means Mr. Sheridan.

A misfortune, of a very different and much more trying nature, was awaiting her in the approaching fate of her beautiful daughter Maria. At the close of the season she writes thus to her old friend Tate Wilkinson :

“ *London, May 29, 1798.* ”

“ **MY DEAR MR. WILKINSON,** ”

“ My plans for this summer are so arranged, that I have no chance of the pleasure of seeing you. The illness of my second daughter has deranged all schemes of pleasure as well as profit. I thank God she is better ; but the nature of her constitution is such, that it will be long ere we can reasonably banish the fear of an approaching consumption. It is dreadful to see an innocent, lovely young creature daily sinking under the languor of illness, which may terminate in death at last, in spite of the most vigilant tenderness. A parent's misery, under this distress, you can more easily imagine than I can describe ; but, if you are the man I take you for, you will not refuse me a favour. It would *indeed* be a great comfort to us all, if you would allow our dear Patty to come to us, on our return to town in the autumn, to stay with us a few months. I am sure it would do my poor Maria so much good ; for the physician tells me she will require the same confinement and

the same care the next winter. And let it not offend the pride of my good friend, when I beg it to be understood that I wish to defray the expense of her journey. Do, dear soul; grant my request. Give my kind compliments to your family, my love to my own dear Patty, and accept yourself the best and most cordial wishes of

“S. SIDDONS.”

Miss Wilkinson accepted the invitation, and became, from that time, a permanent inmate in the Siddons family. As her father, though not rich, was in comfortable circumstances, quite above dependence, her motives for remaining with the Siddonses were as purely affectionate as those of the friends who detained her. She became, in effect, an adopted child of the house; and it is hard to say whether the mother or her daughters had the greater fondness for her. I have read with pleasure the letters which Maria and Sally Siddons wrote to Patty, beseeching her to get her father's consent to this domestication, and they breathe a romantic and unjealous friendship for their mother's favourite, which lasted during all the too short lives of those amiable sisters. Miss Wilkinson is still alive. She lived with the great actress till her last days. Besides the bland temper and disposition which attached Mrs. Siddons to her, she possessed a practical knowledge of the world, which made her a valuable inmate in the family.

During the summer of 1798, Mrs. Siddons writes several letters to her friends, describing the fluctuation of her feelings, between fear and hope respecting Maria. In one of them she says :

“London, June, 1798.

“We are all going to Clifton, not because it is thought good for Maria, but because she fancies that place; and I know so well, from sad experience, how powerfully the imagination operates on a feeble frame, that I hope, from the indulgence of her little whim, to reap some benefit from the journey.”

The lovely object of her anxiety died within four months of this date, and was buried at Bristol, with the following epitaph :

IN THE VAULT OF THIS CHURCH LIES INTERRED  
MARIA SIDDONS,  
WHO PARTED THIS LIFE  
AGED NINETEEN,

Early, bright, transient, chaste as morning dew,  
She sparkled, and exhaled—and went to heaven.

Young.

Within a fortnight of this sad event, she wrote thus to her friend Mrs. Fitz Hugh ;

“ Although my mind is not yet sufficiently tranquillized to talk much, yet the conviction of your undeviating affection impels me to quiet your anxiety so far as to tell you that I am tolerably well. This sad event I have long been prepared for, and bow with humble resignation to the decree of that merciful God who has taken to himself the dear angel I must ever tenderly lament. I dare not trust myself further. Oh that you were here, that I might talk to you of her death-bed,—in dignity of mind, and pious resignation, far surpassing the imaginations of Rousseau and Richardson, in their *Eloise* and *Clarissa Harlowe* ; for hers was, I believe, from the immediate inspiration of the Divinity.

“ Yours,

“ S. .S”

In a letter to another friend, written shortly afterward, Mrs. Siddons speaks with a certain degree of alarm and anxiety about her financial prospects. Mr. Sheridan had not yet settled with her ; and Mr. Siddons was engaged in speculations which threatened equally formidable pecuniary losses. I believe she alludes to his connexion with Sadler's Wells. It was fortunate for the public, if not for herself, that she still felt herself so far from the possession of affluence as to be obliged to renew her efforts at Drury Lane in the following winter.

The first new part which she performed, in 1799, was *Miranda*, in Mr. Boaden's “Aurelio and Miranda.” This play, the story of which was borrowed from Lewis's *Monk*, was well performed, and would have been well received, if the author had been more fortunate in his hearers ; but the audience would not learn their parts. It was meant that they should be alternately sad and mirthful, the piece being tragi-comic. They however laughed at the most tragic passages, and looked grave at the most comic.

In the choice of her next character she must have been biased, and, if my reverence for her permitted, I should even say blinded, by personal friendship. The Rev. Dr. Whalley wrote a tragedy called “The Castle of Montval,” and Mrs. Siddons not only undertook to play the part of its heroine for her benefit, but used her influence in getting the piece brought on the stage.\* The doctor affirmed, and I have no doubt

\* Cast of the parts in “The Castle of Montval:” *Lapont*, Barrymore ; *Old Count of Montval*, Kemble ; *Young Count of Montval*, Holland ;

with truth, in his preface, that he had written this tragedy before he had read "The Robbers" of Schiller ; and in the power of telling a dreadful story, he has certainly no resemblance to the German poet. The plot of "The Castle of Montval" is founded on a horrible fact, which was discovered in the south of France, in 1783, namely the confinement of an unfortunate man in a domestic dungeon by his own family. In Dr. Whalley's play we find the young *Count de Montval* in his hereditary castle, married only a few days before to a young wife, whose character is meant to be the model of human perfection. She is tender, intrepid, gentle, submissive, and yet romantic and resolute. But, with all this compound of virtues in his spouse, the young *Count* is ill at ease in his stately mansion, from the circumstance of his having some time previously locked up his own father in a subterraneous apartment, pretending that he was dead, while in reality he had buried him alive. He resolves, on pretence of business, to repair to Paris, and to confide the keys of a whole wing of the castle, as well as of the dungeon in which his sire is confined, to one *Lapont*, a villain, who is a sharer in his crime. His lady, when he takes leave of her, expresses a desire to have a sight of all the apartments in their habitation ; but he conjures her to defer her visit to the shut-up wing till he should return. Notwithstanding this warning from his wife's curiosity, instead of putting the keys into *Lapont's* hand, he carelessly leaves them, with most marvellous neglect, upon a table, at his departure. They are snatched up by his countess's waiting-maid ; and she brings them to her mistress, together with terrific stories about the part of the house to which those keys gave access being haunted by a ghost, who groaned and spat fire at all who came in his way. This tempting circumstance determines the lady to console her chagrin for her lord's departure, by sleeping in one of the haunted chambers. She takes with her the old steward of the house, who is frightened out of his wits, and places him as a sentinel at the outside of her chamber. Here, though no comic effect is intended, a good deal is produced, at least to my imagination, by the scene that follows ; for the steward is so fearful in his watch that he takes a bottle of cordial liquor from his pocket, and, having swallowed it, falls fast asleep. Meanwhile his mistress, without the aid of such

*Marquis of Vaublanc* (in love with *Matilda*), C. Kemble ; *Count of Colmar* (friend to the *Old Count*), Aickin ; *Blaise* (an old steward), Packer ; *Matilda* (in love with the *Marquis*), Mrs. Powell ; *Teresa* (woman to the *Countess*), Miss Heard.

a sedative, falls asleep also, but is awakened by repeated groans. She starts up, looks round her chamber, and, tearing up the tapestry, discovers a hidden door. There she spies at a distance an aged figure advancing towards the light, and she calls out to him, "*Are you the ghost?*" Old *Montval* tells her his story ; but, with a delicacy as preternatural as if he had been a spirit, insists on going back till morning to his dungeon, where the damps of the earth had bedewed his head. *Lapont* then enters, and attempts to stab the *Countess*, who drops a dagger that she had brought with her. Old *Montval* picks up the weapon, and kills the villain. Young *Montval* enters, and starts back with horror at the sight of his father ; but the old man, though he had been strong enough to despatch *Lapont*, feels death approaching, and forgives his unnatural son. The *Countess* upbraids her husband, who falls at her feet imploring pardon. She tells him to go and "*herd with cannibals that eat men's flesh.*" He takes out a dagger, and stabs himself. She pities him when it is too late, and exclaims, "I have murdered my husband!"

To give popularity to such a piece was out of the question. It is surprising enough that Mrs. Siddons, by her powerful acting, could save it from ridicule. Sagacious as she generally was in dramatic poetry, I must suppose her patronage of this tragedy a casual illusion of her taste, for, if she had seen it in its true light, she was too sincerely its author's friend not to advise him to write for the pulpit instead of the stage.

When the piece was got up at Bath, in 1812, the playbills modestly announced that it had been performed thirty times at Drury Lane, although it had had a run there of only eight nights.

Dr. Whalley, it seems, wrote this drama with the express view to Mrs. Siddons's appearance in it. This news the reverend poet communicated by post to Anna Seward, who sent him the following sensible answer :

" You say I must read Mrs. Siddons's part in your tragedy, as written for her manner of speaking, and for her alone. I have always thought it her highest praise that she is no mannerist, but the warm, glowing, graceful creature who speaks, and looks, and moves by no other impulses but those of nature and passion, consequently with beauty, elegance, and majesty. If she had no other singularity except that of being the most perfect speaker that can be heard, she would not be the transcendent actress which she is invariably found in tragedy. I can associate her face and form with any given part I am read-

ing ; but can no otherwise conceive her expression of countenance, intonation, and emphasis, than by imagining, to the best of my power, how a woman of fine understanding and feeling heart would look and speak, in the circumstances in which you have placed her. If more than that could be done, Mrs. Siddons would not be, as she is, guiltless of ever overstepping the modesty of nature to produce stage-effect. Mrs. Yates continually did that ; and the pathetic Mrs. Cibber had a plaintive monotony which she could not vary. But Mrs. Pritchard and Garrick were, and Mrs. Siddons is, too great and just to be peculiar."

I know not whether the following poetical compliment to Mrs. Siddons is contained in Miss Seward's published poems, but the following note accompanied her sonnet ; and I think it a curiosity of its kind, being a letter written by that lady, but never sent by her to the press.

LETTER FROM MISS SEWARD TO MRS. SIDDONS.

" *Lichfield, Monday Night :*  
" *Aug. 11.*

" I think myself unfortunate that impaired health generally obliges me to seek the coast at this season, when you are granted to the country, and sometimes to this neighbourhood. I have now to lament that a severe cough and inflammation on my lungs, which a fortnight ago prevented my leaving Staffordshire, form, in their yet lurking remains, a barrier to the highest gratification my heart and imagination can know. To encounter a crowded theatre during the present extreme sultriness would, disordered as I am, put my life to the hazard. Anxiously do I hope it may not prove injurious to your health amid exertions so trying. This night you represent *Calista*—twice, in former years, I have witnessed how exquisitely.

" Ruminating this morning, in sweet and bitter thought, your matchless talents, and my seldom power of enjoying their affluence, your virtues, and my distance from their sphere of action, the lines which you will find on this paper descended from my pen. I wish they were more worthy of you ; yet venture to present them to your acceptance.

" If you pass through Lichfield on your return from Birmingham, I wish I might promise myself the honour of the Siddons sleeping beneath my roof. May I entreat of you, in the event of your return that way, to stop with me as many days as may be spared from the important demands upon your

time. It is an honour and happiness of which I have been long desirous. Should it be possible for me to obtain it now, favour me with a line, to say when I may expect you.

“With compliments to Mr. Siddons, and with every kind, good wish, I remain,

“My dear madam,

“Your affectionate friend

“And obedient servant,

“ANNA SEWARD.”

### SONNET.

SIDDONS! when first commenced thy ardent course,  
 The Powers, that guard the Drama's awful shrine—  
 Beauty and grandeur, tenderness and force,  
 Silence that speaks, and eloquence divine—  
 For thee erected that approachless throne  
 None may or hope to conquer or to share ;  
 And all our subject passions trembling own  
 Each various sense subdued and captive there.  
 Yet the heart says, “Respect a rival claim,  
 A claim that rises in unvanquish'd strife :  
 Behold ! dividing still the palm of fame,  
 Her radiant science, and her spotless life.”

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### CHAPTER XVII.

She performs in Sheridan's “Pizarro”—in “Adelaide,” a Tragedy by Pye—*Lady Jane*, in Joanna Baillie's “De Montfort”—in Godwin's “Antonio”—in Sotheby's “Julian and Agnes”—in “The Winter's Tale”—Her danger from Fire in the Statue-scene—Visits Wales, on her way to Ireland.

DURING the rest of her professional life, Mrs. Siddons appeared in no new drama that attracted crowded houses, excepting “Pizarro.” The season of 1799 was an uncommonly protracted one at Drury Lane ; it was not concluded till the 4th of July, and the last thirty-five nights of it were almost consecutively employed in the representation of this piece, which was adapted to the stage entirely by Sheridan, from an English translation of Kotzebue's German play. Sheridan certainly put no new laurels on his head by this adaptation, and he got no solid credit for it, except at his banker's ; but he made money, for which, at that time, he was perhaps more

immediately anxious than for fame. In some particulars, it must be confessed that he has rather amended the original. He judiciously omitted the comic scene of *Diego*, as well as *Elvira's* confession of her love for *Alonzo*, and her reappearance in the character of a nun. His introduction of *Rolla's* passage across the bridge was also a strikingly improving touch. In that scene, the pencil of Lawrence has done noble justice to the form of Kemble.

In adapting "Pizarro" for the stage, Sheridan, unacquainted with the original language, worked from an English paraphrase. With regard to style and imagery, he may have sometimes relieved the over-flat familiarity of the German play, but, where he found the opposite fault of turgidity, he has adhered with tolerable fidelity to the British translator. In one speech, a warrior predicts that his bones will rattle in his tomb with joy at his posthumous fame ; and in the first scene of the second act, *Cora* talks as follows about her child acquiring the organs of mastication. "When first the white blossoms of his teeth appear, breaking the crimson buds that did enclose them." *Elvira* says to *Pizarro*, at the end of the third act, "Thou on Panama's brow didst make alliance with the raving elements, that tore the silence of that horrid night ;—when thou didst follow, as thy pioneer, the crashing thunder's drift, and, stalking o'er the trembling earth, didst plant thy banner by the red volcano's mouth. Thou who, when battling on the sea, and thy brave ship was blown to splinters, wast seen, as thou didst bestride a fragment of the smoking wreck, to wave thy glittering sword above thy head, as thou wouldest defy the world in that extremity. Come, fearless man, meet and survive an injured woman's fury if thou canst."

If this be not bombast, what does the word mean ?

Sheridan was fond of borrowing, but he was a fairer dealer in metaphors than in money, and generally took the loan of the former from himself. To adorn "Pizarro," he drew largely from his own orations at Westminster Hall ; and particularly from his speech on Hastings' trial. He had a personal right, no doubt, to these flowers of speech, and some of them, in their proper place, were very beautiful ; but still they were flowers that scarcely bore to be transplanted, and they assorted indifferently with the German *bouquet* of dramatic eloquence. So that, upon the whole perhaps, Sheridan's mutation of the piece amounted to the Irish improvement,—of turning bad into worse.

Nevertheless, I cannot censure Kotzebue's "Pizarro" without qualification. It is bad, in as far as there is some fustian

in the style, and outrageous sentimentality in the portraiture of character.

The resolution of *Rolla* to stop among his enemies, though he knows that they will burn him alive, rather than kill a snoring sentinel, is extravagantly unnatural ; and so are fifty other circumstances that could be pointed out. I am even free to own, that the piece, to a great extent, owed its fortune to scenery, music, and processions.\* But, the more I look at Kotzebue's faults, the more I am inclined to give him credit for a certain liveliness in dealing with the fancy, that pleases us in spite of them. We all remember that "Pizarro" had an imposing effect upon every spectator, from the king to the commoner. Its attractiveness was felt universally. Nor do I believe that all the pageantry in the world could have wrought so powerfully on the senses, if the piece had not possessed something intrinsically animating. Its subject was new and peculiarly fortunate. It brought the adventures of the most romantic kingdom of Christendom into picturesque combination with the simplicity and superstitions of the transatlantic world ; and gave the imagination a new and fresh empire of Paganism, with its temples, and rites, and altars, without the stale associations of pedantry. I think, if Homer had lived in our own days, he would have laid his scenes in South America.

At first, I believe, Mrs. Siddons by no means liked the character of the camp-follower, *Elvira*, but she certainly raised it into respectability ; and it is remarkable that, with the exception of *Mrs. Haller*, she never performed any character originally that she rendered half so popular. Very different was the impression produced by the next new piece that greeted the winter of 1800, and in which our great actress bore a part ; namely, the tragedy of "Adelaide," by Mr. Pye. The poet laureate's drama had not the hundredth part of the positive faults of that of Kotzebue ; but it had the irredeemable negative fault of lacking interest.

On the 29th of April, Mrs. Siddons performed a new part,

\* Cast of parts : *Elvira*, Mrs. Siddons ; *Rolla*, Kemble ; *Alonzo*, C. Kemble ; *Pizarro*, Barrymore ; *Ataliba*, Powell ; *Las Casas*, J. Aickin ; *Orozembo*, Dowton ; *Valverde*, R. Palmer ; *Old Blind Man*, Cory ; *Boy*, Master Chatterley ; *Sentinel*, Holland ; *Cora*, Mrs. Jordan.

Boaden says, in his Life of Kemble, that Sheridan was miserably anxious about the success of "Pizarro," on the night of its representation. He was sufficiently miserable about Mrs. Jordan's inability to speak a line of the part of *Cora* ; but he also dreaded that Mrs. Siddons would not fall in with his notion of *Elvira*. The actress agreeably surprised him.

as the *Lady Jane*, in Joanna Baillie's tragedy of "De Montfort." I have already adverted to the surprising fact, that dramas, which we peruse in our libraries with little interest, have sometimes been made, by fine acting, most attractive on the stage. The works of Joanna Baillie afford at least one instance of a perfectly converse nature. They will be read with pleasure as long as our language lasts, and yet they have never acquired popularity in the theatre.

To account for this fact, an indiscreet admirer of this poetess would probably resort to the plausible topics of a degenerate public taste, as well as of the enormous size of our theatres, and the pageantry required for filling the stage, which, undoubtedly, diverts the mind from attention to more spiritual charms; but I have too much respect for Joanna Baillie's genius to form any estimate of it on questionable grounds. She brought to the drama a wonderful union of many precious requisites for a perfect tragic writer;—deep feeling, a picturesque imagination, and, except where theory and system misled her, a correct taste, that made her diction equally remote from the stiffness of the French, and the flaccid flatness of the German school: a better stage style than any that we have heard since the time of Shakspeare, or, at least, since that of his immediate disciples.

But, to compose a tragedy that shall at once delight the lovers of poetry and the populace, is a prize in the lottery of Fame which has literally been only once drawn during the whole of the last century, and that was by the author of "Douglas." He, too, wrote several tragedies that were sheer blanks. Scott and Byron themselves both failed in dramatic composition. It is evident, therefore, that Melpomene demands on the stage something, and a good deal more than even poetical talent, rare as that is. She requires a potent and peculiar faculty for the invention of incident adapted to theatric effect;—a faculty which may often exist in those who have not been bred to the stage, but which, generally speaking, has seldom been shown by any poets who were not professional players. There are exceptions to the remark, I know, but there are not many. If Shakspeare had not been a player, he would not have been the dramatist that he is.

If Joanna Baillie had known the stage practically, she would never have attached the importance which she does to the development of single passions in single tragedies; and she would have invented more stirring incidents to justify the passion of her characters, and to give them that air of fatality

which, though peculiarly predominant in the Greek drama, will also be found, to a certain extent, in all successful tragedies. Instead of this, she contrives to make all the passions of her main characters proceed from the wilful natures of the beings themselves. Their feelings are not precipitated by circumstances, like a stream down a declivity, that leaps from rock to rock ; but, for want of incident, they seem often like water on a level, without a propelling impulse.

If, in speaking thus freely of a much regarded contemporary, I should seem indelicate, let it be remembered that Mrs. Siddons's performance of *Jane de Montfort* is no uninteresting part of the great actress's history ; and that, having to deal with the subject, I could not but speak candidly : for, if I took sincerity out of these pages, what value would be left in them ?

Joanna Baillie's first two tragedies were regarded by the reading world as the sweetest strains that hailed the close of the eighteenth century. John Kemble thought that "De Montfort" would suit the stage ; and his acting in the piece, as well as Mrs. Siddons's, was amazingly powerful. Every care was taken that it should receive scenic decoration. Capon painted a very unusual pile of scenery, representing a church of the fourteenth century, with its nave, choir, and side aisles, magnificently decorated, and consisting of seven planes in succession. In width this extraordinary elevation was about 56 feet, 52 in depth, and 37 in height. It was positively a building.

"De Montfort" had a run of eleven nights. The accounts of its reception are discrepant ; but its representation has been, at all events, infrequent. It was brought out again in 1821, when Kean played the part of *De Montfort* very ably. I shall never forget that performance. There was a vast audience ; among whom, I dare say, not threescore persons were personally acquainted with the author of the play. But the poetical character of her who had painted the loves of *Count Basil* and *Victoria* was not forgotten ; and there was a deep and placid attention paid to "De Montfort" that might have led you to imagine every one present was the poetess's friend. There was so much silence and so much applause, that, though I had had misgivings to the contrary, I was impressed at the end with a belief that the play had now acquired, and would henceforth for ever retain, stage popularity. But when I congratulated Kean on having rescued "De Montfort," he told me that, though a fine poem, it would never be an acting play.

If I were asked how I can call poetry beautiful which adapts

itself with difficulty to the stage, I should answer, that Milton's "Comus" is an exquisite poem, but Mrs. Siddons herself could never give it stage popularity.

I cannot dismiss the subject without noticing that Joanna Baillie has left a perfect picture of Mrs. Siddons, in her description of *Jane de Montfort*. In Act 2, Scene 1, the *Page* says to the *Countess Friberg*,

"Madam, there is a lady in your hall  
Who begs to be admitted to your presence."

*Lady.*

"Is it not one of our invited friends?"

*Page.*

"No; far unlike to them. It is a stranger."

*Lady.*

"How looks her countenance?"

*Page.*

"So queenly, so commanding, and so noble,  
I shrunk at first in awe; but when she smiled,  
Methought I could have compassed sea and land  
To do her bidding."

*Lady.*

"Is she young or old?"

*Page.*

"Neither, if I right guess; but she is fair.  
For time has laid his hand so gently on her,  
As he too had been awed."

*Lady.*

"The foolish stripling!  
She has bewitch'd thee. Is she large in stature?"

*Page.*

"So stately, and so graceful in her form,  
I thought at first her stature was gigantic;  
But, on a near approach, I found in truth  
She scarcely does surpass the middle size."

*Lady.*

"What is her garb?"

## Page.

"I cannot well describe the fashion of it :  
She is not deck'd in any gallant trim,  
But seems to me clad in the usual weeds  
Of high habitual state."

## Lady.

"Thine eyes deceive thee, boy.  
It is an apparition thou hast seen."

## Friberg.

"It is an apparition he has seen,  
Or it is Jane de Montfort."

The next new tragedy that was brought out at Drury Lane was from the pen of Godwin.\* Mrs. Siddons performed in it; and, from the author of *Caleb Williams*, a potent drama might well be expected: it went, however, only through three nights. Godwin, in two respects, may compare notes with his brother novelist, Fielding. They both tried the drama without success; and they could both afford to pay for the disappointment out of their ample fame for original genius.

Among men of this class, I doubt if we can well rank the lately deceased William Sotheby; though his learning, accomplishments, and industry entitle his name to a most respectful remembrance. His translation of "Oberon" is among the best poetical versions in our language; and I know that Wieland sent his thanks to him for the performance. But the worthy Sotheby had few ingredients of talent for dramatic poetry; and his "Julian and Agnes," which came out this season, was eminently unsuccessful. In the course of its performance, Mrs. Siddons, as the heroine, had to make her exit from the scene with an infant in her arms. Having to retire precipitately, she inadvertently struck the baby's head violently against a doorpost. Happily the little thing was made of wood, so that her doll's accident only produced a general laugh, in which the actress herself joined heartily.†

\* Namely, "Antonio, or the Soldier's Return," first performed December 13, 1806. *Don Antonio*, J. Kemble; *Don Gusman*, Barrymore; *Don Henry*, C. Kemble; *Don Pedro, King of Arragon*, Wroughton; *Helena*, Mrs. Siddons.

† "Julian and Agnes" was acted April 25. *Alfonso* (really *Julian*), Kemble; *Provost*, Wroughton; *Confessor*, Barrymore; *Infirmier*, Holland; *Prior*, Packer; *Francis*, Attendant on *Agnes*, Powell; *Agnes, Countess of Tortona*, Mrs. Siddons; *Ellen*, Miss Biggs.

Having finished the season of 1801 by a performance for her brother Charles's benefit (May 13), she resumed the accustomed fatigues of her visits to the provincial theatres. From nineteen years of such splendid exertions in London, it might have been expected that a fortune would have accrued to her, at least sufficient wealth to have precluded the necessity for those summer campaigns. But, from her correspondence, I find that circumstances absolutely debarred her from relaxing her labours; though she frequently complains, in her letters, not only of lassitude, but of suffering. The erysipelas, which was ultimately fatal in her old age, began thus early to attack her with a burning heat in her lips that was often very tormenting.

On the 14th of July she writes to her friend Mrs. Fitz Hugh, from Preston.

"In about a fortnight I expect to commence my journey to Bath. Mr. Siddons is there; for he finds no relief from his rheumatism elsewhere. His accounts of himself are less favourable than those of any one who writes to me about him; but I hope and trust that I shall find him better than he himself thinks; for I know, by sad experience, with what difficulty a mind, weakened by long and uninterrupted suffering, admits hope, much less assurance. I shall be here till next Saturday, and after that time at Lancaster, till Tuesday, the 28th; thence I shall go immediately to Bath, where I shall have about a month's quiet, and then begin to play at Bristol for a few nights. *"Such resting finds the sole of unblest feet!"* When we shall come to London is uncertain, for nothing is settled by Mr. Sheridan, and I think it not impossible that *my* winter may be spent in Dublin; for I must go on *making*, to secure the few comforts that I have been able to attain for myself and my family. It is providential for us all that I can do so much. But I hope it is not wrong to say that I am tired, and should be glad to be at rest indeed. I hope yet to see the day when I can be quiet. My mouth is not yet well, though somewhat less exquisitely painful. I have become a frightful object with it for some time, and, I believe, this complaint has robbed me of those poor remains of beauty once admired, at least which in your partial eyes I once possessed. \* \* \* \* \*

"Yours very truly,  
"S. S."

She dropped her intention of going to Dublin, and returned early in the following winter to Drury Lane, where she performed above forty times. It was during this season that the list of her new characters terminated, worthily, with one of Shakspeare's. On the 25th of March, 1802, she, for the first time, performed *Hermione*, in the "Winter's Tale." The infrequency of her acting from the Shaksperian drama must be ascribed to the fact, that she was, generally speaking, not a free agent in the choice of her characters. The popular taste, whether right or wrong, was to be gratified; and the enlightened public, at this time, would troop in suffocating multitudes, for nights together, to see the "Castle Spectre" of Lewis, while the plays of Shakspeare could hardly draw an audience.

She must have long foreseen the transcendent charm which her performance would bestow on the part of *Hermione*; yet there was a policy in reserving it for the years of her professional appearance when her form was becoming too matronly for the personation of juvenile heroines. At the same time, she still had beauty enough left to make her so perfect in the statue-scene, that assuredly there was never such a representative of *Hermione*. Mrs. Yates had a sculpturesque beauty that suited the statue, I have been told, as long as it stood still; but when she had to speak, the charm was broken, and the spectators wished her back to her pedestal. But Mrs. Siddons looked the statue, even to literal illusion; and while the drapery hid her lower limbs, it showed a beauty of head, neck, shoulders, and arms, that Praxiteles might have studied. This statue-scene has hardly its parallel for enchantment even in Shakspeare's theatre. The star of his genius was at its zenith when he composed it; but it was only a Siddons that could do justice to its romantic perfection. The heart of every one who saw her when she burst from the semblance of sculpture into motion, and embraced her daughter *Perdita*, must throb and glow at the recollection.

It so happened, however, that our great actress, while performing a part in which she will never have her equal, narrowly escaped from a death more than fancifully tragic. I have heard her say, that she could never think of the "Winter's Tale" without a palpitation at her heart, from the recollection of the incident to which she alludes, in the following letter to her friend Mrs. Fitz Hugh.

"London, April, 1802.

" \* \* Except for a day or two, the weather has been very favourable to me hitherto. I trust it may continue so, for the 'Winter's Tale' promises to be very attractive ; and, while it continues so, I am bound in honour and conscience to put my shoulder to the wheel, for it has been attended with great expense to the managers, and, if I can keep warm, I trust, I shall continue tolerably well. As to my plans, they are, as usual, all uncertain ; and I am precisely in the situation of poor *Lady Percy*, to whom *Hotspur* comically says, 'I trust thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know.'

" This must continue to be the case, in a great measure, while I continue to be the servant of the public, for whom (and let it not be thought vain) I can never sufficiently exert myself. I really think they receive me every night with greater and greater testimonies of approbation. I know it will give you pleasure to hear this, my dear friend, and you will not suspect me of deceiving myself in this particular.

" The other night had very nearly terminated *all my exertions* ; for, while I was standing for the statue in the 'Winter's Tale,' my drapery flew over the lamps that were placed behind the pedestal ; it caught fire, and, had it not been for one of the scene men, who most humanely crept on his knees and extinguished it, without my knowing any thing of the matter, I might have been burnt to death, or, at all events, I should have been frightened out of my senses. Surrounded as I was with muslin, the flame would have run like wildfire. The bottom of the train was entirely burned. But for the man's promptitude, it would seem as if my fate would have been inevitable. I have well rewarded the good man, and I regard my deliverance as a most gracious interposition of Providence. There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. Here I am, safe and well. God be praised ! and may his goodness make me profit, as I ought, by the time that is vouchsafed me. \* \* \*

" My son Harry's success has been a very great comfort to me. I do think, if I can divest myself of partiality, that it is a very respectable first attempt.\*

" Yours ever truly,

" S. S."

In another letter to the same friend, Mrs. Fitz Hugh,† she

\* Henry Siddons made his first appearance this season at Covent Garden.

† Mrs. Fitz Hugh is the lady of W. Fitz Hugh, Esq., of Bannisters,

alludes to a friendly effort which she made in behalf of the scene man, and in which, I believe, she was successful, namely, in getting a pardon for his son, who was a soldier, and had deserted.

“ \* \* \* I have written myself almost blind for the last three days, worrying everybody to get a poor young man, who otherwise bears a most excellent character, saved from the disgrace and hideous torture of the lash, to which he has exposed himself. I hope to God I shall succeed. He is the son of the man, by me ever to be blest, who preserved me from being burnt to death in the ‘Winter’s Tale.’ The business has cost me a great deal of time; but, if I attain my purpose, I shall be richly paid. It is twelve o’clock at night; I am tired very much. To-morrow is my last appearance. In a few days I shall go to see my dear girl Cecilia. How I long to see the darling!

“ Oh, how you would have enjoyed my *entrée*, in *Constance*, last night. I was received really as if it had been my first appearance in the season. I have gone about to breakfasts and dinners, for this unfortunate young man, till I am quite worn out with them. You know how pleasure, as it is called, fatigues.

“ Ever yours,

“ S. S.”

near Southampton, late Member of Parliament for Tiverton. She is a branch of the ducal family of Hamilton, and the sister of Mr. Hamilton, the accomplished author of “*Egyptiaca*.” Mrs. Siddons was for half her life-time the attached friend and incessant correspondent of Mrs. F., and seldom spent a year without visiting her, at Bannisters.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Mrs. Siddons goes to Ireland with melancholy Presentiments—She visits Conway Castle, in Wales—Fulfils her Engagement at Dublin, and accepts one at Cork—Becomes alarmed by the News of her Daughter Sally's Illness—Quits her Engagement at Cork—Returns to England, and finds her Daughter dead—Acts in the Winter at Covent Garden again—Is severely affected in her Health—The popularity of the Boy Betty.

THE heavy defalcations of payment which Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble had often suffered at Drury Lane, induced them both to retire from that theatre at the close of the season of 1802. Mrs. Siddons's professional industry being still indispensable for the comforts of her family, and Ireland appearing, for the present, to be its most promising field, she repaired thither with the view of wintering in Dublin. She was accompanied by her friend Miss Wilkinson; and, though she had to count upon this absence from home being longer than usual, it is difficult to see why the prospect of it should have filled her with dark forebodings. Yet I know that she left London, on this occasion, with an unaccountable melancholy upon her mind, and an undefined anticipation that some great misfortune was awaiting her. She honoured me with a short note before her departure, from the tenor of which I imagined that the calamity she anticipated was her own death; for she expressed her fears that she should never see her friends in England again. When she took leave of the elder Mr. Greatheed, she gave way to grief in a manner quite unusual to her, and told him she augured that they were never to meet more, till after some great affliction had befallen her. By one of those accidents that almost palliate superstition, they never did meet till after Mr. Greatheed had lost his only son, and she her beloved daughter Sarah Maria. In a letter to Mrs. Piozzi, she anticipates a different event, that might have been more naturally expected.

“ *May, 1802.*

“ Farewell, my beloved friend! a long, long farewell! Oh,

such a day as this has been ! to leave all that is dear to me. I have been surrounded by my family, and my eyes have dwelt with a foreboding tenderness too painful, on the venerable face of my dear father, that tells me I shall look on it no more. I commit my children to your friendly protection, with a full and perfect reliance on the goodness you have always manifested towards

“ Your ever faithful and affectionate  
“ S. SIDDONS.”

At the moment of her parting from Mr. Greatheed, his son Bertie was in robust health. The daughter whom she was destined to see no more had been an invalid during the winter, but I remember, for I was at that time very intimate in the family, that, when Mrs. Siddons set out on the journey, Sally was so well as to enjoy parties very cheerfully, both at home and abroad ; and that there was nothing to justify apprehensions respecting her in the breast of the fondest parent. Mrs. Siddons left Marlborough-street late in May, and, within a few weeks afterward, Sally was in such health and spirits that she wrote the following letter to Miss Wilkinson, dated

“ Queen's Parade, Bath,  
“ July 2, 1802.

“ MY DEAR PATTY,

\* \* \* \* \*

“ We had several very pleasant parties before I left London. Charles Moore's *pic-nic* was quite delightful, it was such fine weather, the Temple Gardens so gay, and the whole scene so beautiful. Bertie Greatheed dined with us, and we walked with him to the Temple, where we arrived at half-past seven : Mrs. Kemble was there. We had tea and coffee ; Dorothy Place and I presided. The rest of my father's party were Mr. Lysons, &c. After tea we walked in the garden till nine, at which time a bell rings, after which no promenading in the garden is permitted. We were all very agreeable, only Dorothy was a little disconcerted because Bertie found fault with her new hat : she looked, however, very beautiful in it. We had a pretty cold supper, and did not part till past twelve o'clock. On Wednesday we went to a party at Sadler's Wells, where we were very pleasant ; and on Saturday Charles Moore sent us orders to see the ‘ Surrender of Calais,’ and ‘ Fortune's Frolic.’ How delightedly I laughed at ‘ Fortune's Frolic.’ ”

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She afterward alludes to her brother's marriage with Miss Murray.

"Miss Murray looked very beautiful, in a white chip hat, with a lace cap under it, her long dark pelisse tied together with purple bows, ready for travelling. Harry was so nervous that Miss Payne was nursing him up with good things. At nine, my father, Mr. Murray, &c. &c., and I, went to church. The ceremony had hardly begun before poor Henry turned as pale as death, and shook from head to foot so that he was obliged to hold by the rails near him to support himself. Miss Murray trembled, and, before she could finish what she had to say after the clergyman, her tears prevented her speaking out: she replied the rest in a whisper. I was extremely affected, and turning to look at the rest, I found that my moist handkerchief was not without companions. Harry was very ready to reply, and cried out, 'I will,' before it was necessary. He wanted to put on the ring, too, before the proper time. After they were married, we signed our names, as witnesses, under them. Then we all saluted Mrs. Henry Siddons, and as soon as we returned to their lodgings, they set off for Birmingham. My father made the bride a present of a handsome coral necklace, bracelet, and earrings. I meant to have given her a ring, but that provoking Hamlet did not send it home in time.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Yours, my dearest Patty,

"SARAH MARIA SIDDONS.

"To Miss Wilkinson, with Mrs. Siddons,  
"Theatre Royal, Dublin."

Mrs. Siddons and her friend proceeded to Ireland by the way of Holyhead. At first her spirits were extremely depressed, but they recovered at last by the change of air and scenery. She very naturally stopped at Stratford, to visit the house of Shakspeare. Here, in spite of her melancholy, she was forced to smile at the cool impudence of a woman who showed them the mansion of the mighty poet, and endeavoured to palm on their credulity a little monster of a boy, with a double tongue, by the name of William Shakspeare, as a great grandson's grandson of his immortal namesake. The show-woman was marvellously loquacious, and Mrs. Siddons remarked that nature had endowed her also with a double allowance of tongue.

Miss Wilkinson has shown me a diary of this journey, which she wrote more than thirty years ago. "On the 25th of May," she says, "a beautiful day, we entered Wales, and got to Conway before sunset. Mrs. Siddons walked about the romantic castle for more than an hour. There were harpers below the building. She sat at one of the windows of the ruins, looking out upon the lovely scenery,—the river glowing in the balmy sunshine,—the vessels gliding up and down,—and the glorious Welsh mountains, till she seemed absorbed in a luxuriant reverie. We returned to our inn, and during supper, a harper was admitted, according to custom, to entertain the strangers. He was the most venerable looking man I ever saw. Mrs. Siddons said that he gave her mind the image of a Druid." In that romantic time and place Mrs. Siddons honoured the humblest poet of her acquaintance by remembering him; and let the reader blame or pardon my egotism, as he may think fit, I cannot help transcribing what the diarist adds,—"Mrs. Siddons said, 'I wish that Campbell were here.'"

"We left Conway," Miss Wilkinson continues, "next morning, and ere long crossed Penman Mawr, where, like other travellers, we alighted from our carriages to look from a bridge that commands the fullest view of the sublime landscape, with all its rocks and water. A lady within hearing of us was in such ecstacies, that she exclaimed, 'This awful scenery makes me feel as if I were only a worm, or a grain of dust on the face of the earth.' Mrs. Siddons turned round, and said, 'I feel very differently.'"

From Dublin, after two months' acting, she wrote to Mrs. Fitz Hugh, on the 2d of August, that her reception in the Irish capital had equalled her highest expectations, and that her profits had gone beyond them. A few days afterward, she left Dublin for Cork, and performed at the latter place for several weeks, at the end of which she returned to the North, and acted at Belfast for nearly a month, amid the loudest greetings of enthusiasm.

From Belfast she and her companion, after spending some days with the hospitable family of Gosford Castle, returned once more to Dublin, and found there, among other letters from England, one from Mr. Siddons, expressing considerable anxiety on pecuniary matters,—stating that a large sum of money had been expended on the house in Marlborough-street, and that a still greater sum would be required for fitting out George for India, and requesting therefore, if Mrs. Siddons did not remain in Dublin, that she would go and perform at Liverpool.

She preferred the far more lucrative speculation of continuing in the Irish capital, and renewed her engagement with the manager, Jones. Meanwhile her popularity, both personal and professional, was unabated. The presence of royalty could not have been welcomed with more demonstrations of zeal than she received from all ranks of the community ; and she speaks, in all her letters, with gratitude of the "*warm-hearted Irish.*" But, though feted by the rich, flattered by the talented, and cheered wherever she made her appearance, she had still to endure those harassments which are scarcely separable from the player's vocation. Mr. Jones was not only an overbearing gentleman, but so practically litigious, that it was unsafe to gainsay his managerial will in the slightest particular ; for he concluded every dispute by sending for his solicitor ; and, by long training, he had become an adept in litigation. It required all her patience to fulfil her engagement with him peaceably, and without forfeiting either her profits or dignity.

With all her popularity, too, she was not without some detractors, even on the warm-hearted side of the Channel. It was rumoured, indeed asserted, in a Dublin newspaper, that she had refused to play for the benefit of the Lying-in Hospital. She refuted this falsehood as distinctly as she had disproved other calumnious allegations of her uncharitableness ; but it is painful to find her obliged to exculpate herself, at a time when her heart was still sore with filial sorrow ; for, on the 9th of December, she received the intelligence of her father's death. It was shortly after that she had to write to Jones the following letter about the above gross misrepresentation.

"Dublin, January, 1803.

"DEAR SIR,

"The candour and generosity with which you were so good as to acknowledge the truth asserted in my letter to you, respecting the Lying-in Hospital, encourage me to hope that you would forward any means of my public justification. I find that the publication of this letter is universally expected, and, as you yourself so kindly yesterday suggested this as the most effectual measure of effecting that purpose, I beg you will do me the favour of returning that letter to me, as I have only an imperfect copy of it (which I would not willingly present to the public), if you have not destroyed it. It is hard to bear at one and the same time the pressure of domestic sorrow, the anxiety of business, and the necessity of healing a wounded

reputation ; but such is the rude enforcement of the time, and I must sustain it as I am enabled by that Power who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ S. SIDDONS.”

On the 2d of February she had the satisfaction of receiving a letter from Sally, describing herself as well and gay. A few days afterward, her grief at the prospect of a long separation from her son George was soothed by his coming to visit her before his departure for India. He stopped with her a fortnight. When it came to the last, his affection, and fear of over-agitating his mother would not allow him to take a formal farewell of her. George had recommendations from royalty itself to the Governor-general of India, almost amounting to a command to provide for him handsomely ; and the boy’s prospects were so hopeful and ambitious, that she resigned herself as cheerfully as she could to an event that was to make him happy. “ It was gratifying,” Miss Wilkisen says, “ to see them fondly trying to make all the happiness they could out of the last days of their domestication, though their mutual smiles were often more affecting than any tears.”

Hitherto none of her correspondents had alarmed her about Sally ; and Mr. Siddons himself seems to have participated in the general and fallacious security respecting her. Mrs. Siddons, therefore, made an engagement, that, on leaving Dublin, she should perform at Cork, and she repaired thither in March. On the 10th of that month Mr. Siddons communicated, in a letter to Miss Wilkinson, that Sally was very poorly, but charged her not to disturb Mrs. Siddons with the intelligence. Miss Wilkinson, however, thought it her duty to show the letter to Mrs. Siddons, who would have instantly set off for England if the winds had permitted her. But the equinoctial gales had set in, and no vessel durst venture out of the harbour. Two days later a letter came to Mrs. Siddons herself, from her husband, requesting her to set her mind at ease with regard to Sally, and to proceed to Cork. She obeyed his injunction, and acted at the theatre there on the 21st of March, but in a state of miserable anxiety, as may be seen by the following letter to Mrs. Fitz Hugh.

“ Cork, March 21, 1803.

“ MY DEAR FRIEND,  
“ How shall I sufficiently thank you for all your kindness to

me ? You know my heart, and I spare my words ; for, God knows, my mind is in so distracted a state that I can hardly write or speak rationally. Oh ! why did not Mr. Siddons tell me when she was first taken so ill ! I should then have got clear of this engagement, and what a world of wretchedness and anxiety would have been spared to me ! And yet, good God ! how should I have crossed the sea ? For a fortnight past it has been so dangerous, that nothing but wherries have ventured to the Holy Head ; but yet, I think I should have put myself into one of them if I could have known that my poor dear girl was so ill. Oh ! tell me all about her. I am almost broken-hearted, though the last accounts tell me she has been mending for several days. Has she wished for me ? but I know, I feel that she has. The dear creature used to think it weakness in me when I told her of the possibility of what might be endured from illness, when that tremendous element divides one from one's family. Would to God I were at her bedside ! It would be for me then to suffer with resignation what I cannot now support with any fortitude. If any thing could relieve the misery I feel, it would be that my dear and inestimable Sir Lucas Pepys had her under his care. Pray tell him this, and ask him to write me a word of comfort. Will you believe that I must play to-night, and can you imagine any wretchedness like it in this terrible state of mind ? For a moment I comfort myself by reflecting on the strength of the dear creature's constitution, which has so often rallied, to the astonishment of us all, under similar serious attacks. Then again, when I think of the frail tenure of human existence, my heart fails, and sinks into dejection. God bless you ! The suspense that distance keeps me in you may imagine, but it cannot be described.

"Adieu, your ever affectionate,  
"S. S."

For several succeeding days her agony was wound up to the highest pitch by the non-arrival of letters from home. Mrs. Fitz Hugh had written to her duly, and so had Mr. Siddons, but, owing to the stormy state of the weather, the Cork packet arrived irregularly. At last, in the course of a week, she received tidings that were not favourable, though at the same time *not* desperate ; but she could endure her apprehensions no longer, and determined immediately to return to England. She told Mr. Pero, the manager of the Cork theatre, that she was utterly unable to finish her engagement, and he assented

to her renouncing it, though it was a great loss to him, in the most humane and honourable manner. She and Miss Wilkinson accordingly set off for Dublin, being informed that it was a safer route to England than direct from Cork. In Dublin they were again detained by contrary winds, and, as if every circumstance had conspired to make her miserable, Mrs. Siddons found no intelligence respecting her daughter awaiting her arrival there. Her announcement of her intention to leave Cork not having reaching Mrs. Fitz Hugh in due time, her friend had still addressed her letters to the South. Mrs. Siddons therefore writes to that friend in a tone of impatience too excusable under such excruciating circumstances.

*“ Dublin, April 2, 1803.*

“ I am perfectly astonished, my dear friend, that I have not heard from you, after begging it so earnestly. Good God! what can be the reason that intelligence must be extorted, as it were, in circumstances like mine. One would think common benevolence, setting affection quite aside, might have induced some of you to alleviate, as much as possible, such distress as you know I must feel. The last letter from Mr. Siddons stated that she was better. Another letter, from Mr. Montgomery, at Oxford, says that George gave him the same account. Why, why am I to hear this only from a person at that distance from her, and so ill informed as the writer must be of the state of her health? Why should not you or Mr. Siddons have told me this? I cannot account for your silence at all, for you know how to feel. I hope to sail to-night, and to reach London the third day: God knows when that will be. Oh God! what a home to return to, after all I have been doing! and what a prospect to the end of my days!

“ Yours ever,

“ S. S.”

As soon as the weather would permit, she crossed to Holyhead, and proceeded to Shrewsbury as fast as she could find conveyances. There she met with a letter from Mr. Siddons, acknowledging Sally's danger, and affectionately sharing her parental feelings: but also praying her to remember the preciousness of her own life, and not to endanger it by over-rapid travelling. Only an hour or two after this letter had been written, her daughter's sufferings had come suddenly to a close; and, while she was reading it, a person recently arrived from

London sent to call Miss Wilkinson out of the room, and to tell her that Miss Siddons was dead. Her faithful friend would have fain broken the news upon Mrs. Siddons gradually, but her countenance betrayed her; and the bereaved mother, having now no occasion for rapid travelling, sank into speechless despondency, and lay for a day at Shrewsbury (Miss Wilkinson says, in her Diary), cold and torpid as a stone, and with scarcely a sign of life.

She proceeded at last on her journey to London. At Oxford she found a condoling letter awaiting her from her brother John; and a few miles from town she was met by her brother Charles, who accompanied her next day on her first visit to their widowed mother. The agitation of her mind produced a severe indisposition, for which the air and waters of Cheltenham were recommended. From that place she dates the following letter to Mrs. Fitz Hugh.

*“Birch Farm, Cheltenham, June, 1803.*

“The serenity of the place, the sweet air and scenery of my cottage, and the medicinal effect of the waters, have done some good to my shattered constitution. \* \* \*

“I am unable, at times, to reconcile myself to my fate. The darling being for whom I mourn is assuredly released from a life of suffering, and numbered among the blessed spirits made perfect. But to be separated for ever, in spite of reason and in spite of religion, is at times too much for me. Give my love to dear Charles Moore,\* if you chance to see him. Have you read his beautiful account of my sweet Sally. It is done with a truth and modesty which has given me the sincerest of all pleasures that I am now allowed to feel, and assures me still more than ever that he who could feel and taste such excellence, was worthy of the particular regard she had for him.

“Yours very truly,

“S. S.”

\* To Charles Moore, the brother of General Sir John Moore, I was indebted for my introduction to the acquaintance of Mrs. Siddons and her daughter. I shall never forget the first meeting I had with him after Miss Siddons's death; it was accidentally in the street: he shook hands with me, but could not speak. He gave me his arm, however, and we walked together to his chambers, where he showed me a bust of Sally Siddons. It scarcely did her justice, to my remembrance. She was not strictly beautiful, but her countenance was like her mother's, with brilliant eyes, and a remarkable mixture of frankness and sweetness in her physiognomy.

During her stay at Birch Farm she was consoled by having her little daughter Cecilia with her, as well as by a visit from Miss Dorothy Place, the dear friend of her lost Sally, who had been with her during all her illness, and had closed her eyes. Her brother John Kemble, and Charles Moore, also came to her in this retreat; and the whole congenial party left Cheltenham in July, to make an excursion among the scenery of the Wye, which proved of benefit to Mrs. Siddons's spirits. After their tour she paid a visit to Mrs. Fitz Hugh, at Bannisters, and then returned to London, where she made an engagement to act the following winter at Covent Garden.\*

This change of her theatre promised agreeable results to Mrs. Siddons, in which she was not disappointed. John Kemble was here, as he had been at Drury Lane, both actor and acting manager; but he was not at Covent Garden subjected to rapacious alienations of the payment due to himself and his fellow-performers; for Harris, as the managing proprietor, was honourably punctual. On the other hand, Covent Garden Theatre was immediately and well rewarded by the profits that accrued from the united talents of the Kemble and the Siddons, and the addition of sixteen private boxes to those that were taken by the aristocracy, at the rent of 300*l.* a year, was a flattering earnest of what this new connexion would achieve.

She made her first appearance after this engagement at Covent Garden, as *Isabella*, in the "Fatal Marriage," on the 27th of September, 1803. On the 6th of the following month she acted *Lady Randolph*, and her son Henry was the *Douglas*, and Kemble took *Old Norval*.

She made her *Elvira* no less popular at Covent Garden than it had been at the other theatre, and she performed it oftener than any other character during the season. On the first night, however, that "Pizarro" was produced at the former house, considerable embarrassment was occasioned by the inability of the actor Cooke to articulate his part. He made matters worse by attempting to say, in the way of apology, "Ladies and

\* Mr. Robertson, the secretary of Covent Garden Theatre, has favoured me with the following information respecting the terms of her engagements at that house.

Of the amount of her salary in 1803 there is no document; but, in 1804 and 5, it was 20*l.* per night.

In 1805-6, she acted on an average of 27*l.* per night.

In 1806-7, she received 30 guineas per night.

In 1810-11, 30 guineas per night; and in 1811-12, 50 guineas per night.

*gentlemen, my old complaint.*" On his removal from the stage, Henry Siddons read his part, and so well as to gain much credit. Mrs. Siddons had no new character this season, nor indeed ever afterward; but, from September, 1803, to May, 1804, she made the amazing exertion of performing sixty nights.\*

At the conclusion of the season, she went, with Miss Wilkinson, on a visit to her friend Mrs. Damer, at Strawberry Hill. This lady, like her illustrious guest, was fond of sculpture, and, having no other occupation to engross her time, she was a more skilful artist. A specimen of her statuary stands on the staircase of the British Museum. At Strawberry Hill, during Mrs. Siddons's residence, the Duke of Orleans, now King of the French, and his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, were occasional visitants. It is creditable to the memory of the latter, that he never met our great actress without showing peculiar and marked respect for her. She was never at Brighton, when the prince was there, without being a guest at the Pavilion.

At the close of the summer she had a severe attack of lumbago, and, for the sake of country air, she removed from Marlborough street to a cottage at Hampstead. Mr. Siddons and she were now, by a sad fatality, invalids with the same rheumatic affection. Their new abode, on the day of their arrival, much delighted the old gentleman. He ate his dinner with uncommon relish, and, looking out at the beautiful prospect, said, "Sally, this will cure all our ailments." But he was mistaken, for Mrs. Siddons was confined for weeks to her bed, with extreme suffering. She tried, at last, the effect of electricity, and it proved beneficial, but the agony of the operation was excruciating. The touch of the sparks made her feel as if burning lead had been running through her veins, and extorted such shrieks from her, that Mr. Siddons said he was afraid of the people from without bursting into the house, under the idea that murder was going on.

Before the winter set in, she was relieved from pain, and they returned to town; but Mr. Siddons having relapsed, while she recovered, he resolved once more to try the waters of Bath

\* She acted *Isabella* five times; *Lady Randolph* once; *Mrs. Haller* three times; *Elvira*, twelve; *Mrs. Beverley*, five; *Calista*, four; *Belvidera*, six; *Isabella*, in "Measure for Measure," two; *Lady Macbeth*, seven; *Hermione* ("Distressed Mother"), two; *Jane Shore*, one; *Queen Mary*, one; *Desdemona*, six; *Constance*, two; *Grecian Daughter*, one; *Zara* (in the "Mourning Bride"), two.

for his rheumatism ; and, as Mrs. Siddons and Miss Wilkinson had no occasion for so large a house as that in Marlborough-street, she parted with it, and took lodgings in Princess-street, Hanover-square. Her landlord was an upholsterer, of the name of Nixon. He and his wife, at this day, mention their illustrious tenant with a devotion like that of Catholics speaking of a saint ; and they dwell particularly on the suavity of her temper. One day looking at her landlord's card, she found that the upholsterer was also an undertaker, and she said laughingly, " Well then, Mr. Nixon, I bespeak you to bury me." Twenty-seven years afterward Mr. Nixon conducted her funeral.

Mrs. Siddons's health, though she had recovered from excessive agony, was certainly very feeble during the winter and spring of 1804-5, and she performed only twice at Covent Garden in the whole course of the season. Yet I suspect that bad health was not the only cause of her absence from the stage. This was the season when Master Betty made his first appearance on the London boards, and was equally the magnet of attraction at each of the great theatres. The popularity of that baby-faced boy, who possessed not even the elements of a good actor, was a hallucination in the public mind, and a disgrace to our theatrical history. It enabled managers to give him sums for his childish ranting that were never accorded to the acting of a Garrick or a Siddons. His bust was stuck up in marble by the best sculptors ; he was painted by Opie and Northcote ; and the verses that were poured out upon him were in a style of idolatrous adulation. Actors and actresses of merit were obliged to appear on the stage with this minion, and even to affect the general taste for him, in order to avoid giving offence. But Mrs. Siddons never condescended to act with him, nor even concealed her disgust at the popular infatuation. She went to see him, however, and gave him all the praise that he deserved. At the end of the play, the late Lord Abercorn came into her box, and told her that that boy, Betty, would eclipse every thing which had been called acting in England. " My lord," she answered, " he is a very clever, pretty boy, but nothing more."

## CHAPTER XIX.

**Mrs. Siddons removes her abode to Westbourne—Mr. Siddons's Verses on the same—Mrs. Siddons's Letter to her son Henry, from Broadstairs—Characters she played in 1806-7 at Covent Garden—Mr. Siddons's Death—Mrs. Siddons's Letter to Mrs. Piozzi on the event—The Burning of Covent Garden Theatre—Rebuilding of the House, and the O. P. Riots—Letter to Mrs. Siddons from Mr. Jekyll—Another from Hannah More—Mrs. Siddons takes her Farewell of the Stage.**

In the April of 1805, Mrs. Siddons took possession of a pleasant cottage at Westbourne, near Paddington, which she furnished for her permanent residence. It was small, but contained more accommodation than its appearance indicated. With the aid of her trusty upholsterer, Nixon, she fitted it up very elegantly, built an additional room for a studio, and laid out the shrubbery and garden with great taste. She was surrounded with fresh air and green fields, and describes herself as delighted with her retreat. Mr. Siddons passed some weeks at Westbourne; but his infirm health obliged him to make arrangements for having a permanent establishment at Bath, as he found no relief from rheumatism anywhere else. To Mrs. Siddons's constitution the sultry summer air of that place was noxiously relaxing, and her profession put it out of the question as a winter sojourn. She went, however, as often as her health and avocations would permit her, to join her husband at Bath; and their partial separation, if such it could be called, was one of convenience, if not of absolute necessity.

Mr. Boaden, in his Life of the great woman, has described this parting as if it had been a formal one occasioned by incompatibility of temper. I find no fault with him for having done so, for he only credited the prevailing, though false rumour to that effect; and because he has also with justice and propriety recorded the fact, that Mr. Siddons, by the last solemn act of his life, demonstrated the honour and esteem in which he had held his partner. But the report that they were separated from alienation was absolutely unfounded. Mr. Siddons was obliged to be at Bath on account of his health, and Mrs. Siddons to be in London on account of her profes-

sion. They lived as much together as circumstances would permit during the rest of Mr. Siddons's life ; and I would ask any candid person if he can find the slightest symptom of unfriendly feelings between them in the following verses, which Mr. Siddons wrote ?

## ON MRS. SIDDONS'S COTTAGE AT WESTBOURNE.

1.

Would you I'd Westbourne Farm describe,  
I'll do it then, and free from gall,  
For sure it would be sin to gibe  
A thing so pretty and so small.

2

The poplar walk, if you have strength,  
Will take a minute's time to step it ;  
Nay, certes, 'tis of such a length,  
Twould almost tire a frog to leap it.

3.

But when the pleasure-ground is seen,  
Then what a burst comes on the view ;  
Its level walk, its shaven green,  
For which a razor's stroke would do.

4.

Now, pray be cautious when you enter,  
And curb your strides from much expansion ;  
Three paces take you to the centre,  
Three more, you're close against the mansion.

5.

The mansion, cottage, house, or hut,  
Call 't what you will, has room within  
To lodge the king of Lilliput,  
But not his court, nor yet his queen.

6.

The kitchen-garden, true to keeping,  
Has length and breadth and width so plenty,  
A snail, if fairly set a-creeping,  
Could scarce go round while you told twenty.

7.

Perhaps you'll cry, on hearing this,  
What ! every thing so very small ?  
No, she that made it what it is,  
Has greatness that makes up for all.

Let the reader judge for himself whether these verses be in the style of a man parting from his wife on unpleasant terms.

If I had met with allusions to the alleged infelicity of Mrs. Siddons as a married woman, in any unfriendly account of her

life, I should have passed them over in silence ; but Mr. Boaden has taken up the subject ; and he treats it not only like a gentleman, but with an air of sincere belief, so that I can scarcely avoid it, although I feel it to be a matter of delicate animadversion. That Mr. and Mrs. Siddons never had any petty disputes in the whole course of their conjugal union, is more than I would undertake to affirm of them, or of nine-tenths of all the wedded pairs that ever existed ; but I speak my sincere belief, when I say that they never had any differences sufficient to interfere substantially with their firm and mutual regard. If it be asked why I express myself so confidently on this subject, I have to answer, that I derive my belief from the earnest assurance of one who lived under their roof for many years, and who was on the most amicable terms with both of them. When there is any real unhappiness between man and wife, and when the latter has any peculiarly confidential friend, I look on the probability of the husband disliking, if not cordially detesting, that confidential friend of his wife, as amounting to moral certainty. Now, Miss Wilkinson stood exactly in that relation to the great woman. She was to her as an adopted daughter. But what was the conduct of Mr. Siddons to this dearest favourite of his wife ? He was invariably kind to her ; and his letters bespeak a frank and almost paternal fondness. I knew Mr. Siddons only when he was old and a suffering invalid, but he was even then remarkably gentlemanlike and gracious ; and I never recall those delightful evenings at Marlborough-street, which brought me some of the dearest friends and happiest hours of my whole existence, without remembering that the great woman's queen-mother-like welcome was enhanced by her husband's urbanity. He was remarkably full of anecdote.

Among the letters of Mrs. Siddons I have found the following, which, though it alludes to a transient difference, shows that their conjugal disputes were of no exasperated nature.

“ December 16, 1804.

“ MY DEAR SID.\*

“ I am really sorry that my little flash of merriment should have been taken so seriously, for I am sure, however we may differ in trifles, *we can never cease to love each other*. You wish me to say what I expect to have done—I can expect

\* This was her usual style of contracting his name, in speaking or writing to him.

nothing more than you yourself have designed me in your will. Be (as you ought to be) the master of all while God permits, but, in case of your death, only let me be put out of the power of any person living. This is all that I desire ; and I think that you cannot but be convineed that it is reasonable and proper.

“ Your ever affectionate and faithful

“ S. S.”

During the summer of 1805 she professionally visited both the Scottish and Irish capitals, with her usual applause and success ; and, returning to London, she acted thirty-nine times\* at Covent Garden, during the season 1805-6, but only in her accustomed characters.

In theatrical life, Mrs. Siddons had now ceased to assume any fresh part ; but, in 1806, I find her fulfilling, in real life, the new character of a grandmother, with all the truth and benignity that belonged to her nature. From Broadstairs she writes to her son Henry, on the 6th of August of that year :

“ MY DEAR HARRY,

“ I have very great pleasure in telling you that your dear little ones are quite well. The bathing agrees with them perfectly. They are exceedingly improved in looks and appetite, though their stomachs turn a little, poor dears, at the sight of the machines ; but indeed, upon the whole, the dipping is pretty well got over, and they look so beautiful after it, it would do your heart good to see them. I assure you they are the belles of Broadstairs. Their nurse is very good-humoured to them. She is certainly not a beauty, but they like her as well as if she were a Venus. Never were little souls so easily managed, or so little troublesome. They are very fond of Patty—I’m afraid they don’t like me so well, for I am not half so good a playfellow as Patty or their grandfather. Accept, and present to dear Harriet our united loves, and believe me, my dear Harry,

“ Your affectionate mother,

“ S. S.”

In her season of 1806-7, at Covent Garden, she played

\* *Isabella*, ten times ; *Queen Katharine*, eight ; *Mrs. Beverley*, four ; *Jane Shore*, twice ; *Mrs. Haller*, twice ; *Calista*, once ; *Euphrasia*, once ; *Lady Macbeth*, eight ; *Belvidera*, three ; *Elvira*, six times.

*Queen Katharine* seven times; *Lady Macbeth* (to Cooke's *Macbeth*) five times; *Isabella* ("Fatal Marriage") twice; *Elvira* twice; *Lady Randolph* once; *Mrs. Beverley* once; *Euphrasia* once; and *Volumnia* fifteen times. It is pleasant to perceive in this list Shakspeare's dramatic popularity keeping ahead of Sheridan's. The part of *Cordelia* she now gave up to Miss Smith, since *Mrs. Bartley*. The young *Roscus* was no longer the idol of London; but it would seem that he was still much run after in the provincial theatres, from what she writes to her friend the following summer, dating

"Liverpool, July 15, 1807.

"The houses are tolerably good. I can't expect to be followed like the great genius, Master Betty, you know; but I hope to put about 1000*l.* into my pocket this summer. 'Tis better to work hard for a short time, and have done with it. If I can but add three hundred a year to my present income, I shall be perfectly well provided for; and I am resolved, when that is accomplished, to make no more positive engagements in summer. I trust that God, in his great mercy, will enable me to do it; and then, oh, how lazy, and saucy, and happy will I be. You will have something to do, I can tell you, my dear, to keep me in order.

"Yours,

"S. S."

Her subsequent season at Covent Garden was uncommonly short, and extended only to the 11th of December, 1807, when the "Winter's Tale" was announced, for her last appearance before Easter. It proved, eventually, to be her last for the season. Immediately after the performance, she set off for Bath, where she spent six weeks with Mr. Siddons. The state of his health was so tolerable, that he promised to spend a part of the ensuing summer at Westbourne; so that she left him without apprehensions, in February, 1808. But, within a month from the time of her departure, he was seized very suddenly with his last illness, and expired on the 11th of March. When the intelligence of his death came to her, in Edinburgh, it of course put a stop to her performances, and, as soon as she was able to travel, she returned to Westbourne. From thence she writes to Mrs. Piozzi.

"Westbourne Farm, March 29, 1808.

"How unwearied is your goodness to me, my dear friend,  
\* \* \*. There is something so awful in this sudden dissolution

of so long a connexion; that I shall feel it longer than I shall speak of it. May I die the death of my honest, worthy husband, and may those to whom I am dear remember me when I am gone, as I remember him, forgetting and forgiving all my errors, and recollecting only my quietness of spirit and singleness of heart. Remember me to your dear Mr. Piozzi. My head is still so dull with this stunning surprise, that I cannot see what I write. Adieu, dear soul; do not cease to love your friend,

“S. S.”

[1808.] After her customary summer visit to her friends the Fitz Hughs, at Bannisters, she returned to her professional duties, in September; but she had acted only a few nights, when that dreadful accident took place by which the theatre of Covent Garden was burnt to the ground. It was generally attributed to the wadding of a gun, that was discharged in the performance of “Pizarro,” having lodged unperceived in some crevice of the scenery. Miss Wilkinson says, that before the audience left the house, she perceived a strong smell of fire while she was sitting in Mr. Kemble’s box, and spoke of it to several of the servants as she was passing to Mrs. Siddons’s dressing-room; but they said that it was only the smell of the lamps in the front of the stage. About four o’clock on the morning of the 20th of September, this noble building, which was erected in the year 1738, and enlarged, with considerable alterations, in 1792, was seen suddenly to be on fire: the flames continued to rage so fiercely, that in three hours the whole interior of the theatre, with the scenery, wardrobe, musical and dramatic libraries, &c., became a heap of smoking ruins. The loss of property of all descriptions, including that of the organ bequeathed to the house by Handel, and of the unpublished MS. music of first-rate composers, was estimated at 150,000*l.*

But the damage done to property by that dreadful event was light in comparison with the horrors which it occasioned by human deaths and sufferings. A number of firemen were crushed under the falling-in of the burning roof, and several unfortunate individuals, having approached the conflagration too nearly, were scalded to death by the steam of the water that arose from it. I shudder in calculating the number of victims—they must have amounted to thirty! Many of them were dug out of the ruins in such a state that they could not be identified.

The performances of the Covent Garden company were transferred first to the Opera House, and afterward to the Haymarket Theatre. It was one of our actress's busiest seasons. Between September 12, 1808, and May 6, 1809, she performed forty times.\* Mr. Young made his first appearance this season as *Macbeth*, and as *Beverley*. She acted with him on both occasions, and in more than one of her letters to her friends alludes to him as an actor of invaluable acquisition to the British stage.

In the summer I find her paying another visit to Scotland, and writing with more than usual vivacity about the agreeableness of her northern friends. She mentions particularly her happiness in frequently meeting with Henry Erskine, Walter Scott, James Ballantyne, and the amiable Stirlings of Drum-pella, with whom she resided for some time, at their seat near Glasgow. Returning home by way of the Lakes, she stopped for several days at Lowwood, on the borders of Windermere, enchanted by the beautiful scenery. The learned Bishop of Llandaff, who was in the neighbourhood, failed not to pay his respects to her.

Covent Garden Theatre arose from its ashes a more splendid building than it had ever been, and it was reopened on the 18th of September, 1809, exactly two days less than a twelvemonth from the time of its destruction.† The O. P.

\* *Lady Macbeth*, fifteen times; *Belvidera*, once; *Isabella*, once; *Elvira*, once; *Lady Randolph*, once; *Euphrasia*, once; *Mrs. Haller*, three; *Mrs. Beverley*, nine; *Zara* ("Mourning Bride"), three; *Queen Katherine*, seven.

† I subjoin the following extract from an account of the O. P. riots, published by Stockdale, and entitled the "Covent Garden Journal, September 18."

"At four o'clock on that evening, every avenue to the house was besieged by numerous crowds, manifesting the most eager impatience for the opening of the doors. In front of the Bow-street arcade the blocking party determined on a *coup de main*, and actually stormed and carried by escalade the iron railing which separated them from the land of promise.

"The interior of the house was brilliantly lighted up, and served most impressively to display the beauteous order of the edifice, raised, by the creative power of the architect, from a late dismal chaos. The groups of admiring spectators, as they entered, burst into the warmest expressions of applause; and, for some time, no sentiment obtusely but that of self-complacency, and the satisfaction arising from novel enjoyment. Before six, the house was overflowingly full, and yet at least three times the number of those admitted remained in the entrances and lobbies, making vain endeavours to obtain farther entrance.

"Mr. Kemble made his appearance in the costume of *Macbeth*, and

riots, which lasted for weeks after the first occupation of the house, must be remembered by all the adults of the present generation. There can be little doubt that these disturbances were but an indirect reaction on that injustice which invests our great theatres with their monopolies ; but still the outrages, considered in themselves, were lawless and disgusting. If the claimants of old prices thought themselves aggrieved, their only equitable recourse was to have kept away from the theatre ; for they had no more right to extort terms from the proprietors by personal threats, by injuring the furniture of the house, and by howlings, savage dances, and dust-bells, than they had to terrify the bakers by similar means into the sale of cheaper bread. These riots excluded our great actress from the stage for the greater part of the season. During this forced vacation, she writes to her friend Mrs. Fitz Hugh :

“ December 2.

“ I am quite vexed, my dear, with Miss L. for giving you such an account of me. My appearance of illness was occasioned entirely by an agitating visit that morning from poor Mr. John Kemble, on account of the giving up of the private boxes, which, I fear, must be at last complied with. Surely nothing ever equalled the domineering of the mob in these days. It is to me inconceivable how the public at large submits to be thus dictated to, against their better judgment, by a handful of imperious and intoxicated men. In the mean time, what can the poor proprietors do but yield to overwhelming necessity ?

“ Could I once feel that my poor brother’s anxiety about the theatre was at an end, I should be, marvellous to say, as well as I ever was in my life. But only conceive what a state he must have been in, however good a face he might put upon the business, for upwards of three months ; and think what his poor wife and I must have suffered, when, for weeks together, such were the outrages committed on his house and otherwise, that I trembled for even his personal safety : she, poor soul,

amid volleys of hissing, hooting, groans, and catcalls. He made an address, but it was impossible to hear it. His attitudes were imploring, but in vain. \* \* The play proceeded in pantomime ; not a word was heard, save now and then the deeply modulated tones of the bewitching Siddons. On her entrance she seemed disturbed by the clamour, but in the progressive stages of her action she went through her part with wonderful composure. Kemble appeared greatly agitated, yet in no instance did his trouble interrupt him in carrying on ‘*the curtain of the scene*.’ Perhaps a finer dumb show was never witnessed.”

living with ladders at her windows, in order to make her escape through the garden in case of an attack. Mrs. Kemble tells me his nerves are much shaken. What a time it has been with us all, beginning with fire, and continued with fury ! Yet sweet sometimes are the uses of adversity. They not only strengthen family affection, but teach us all to walk humbly with our God.

“Yours,

“S. S.”

The season 1810-11 might well be remembered in the life of John Kemble, for the new popularity which he gained in acting *Cato*, but in this penultimate year of Mrs. Siddons's professional history, she supported her reputation without any particularly memorable occurrence.

In the course of the year I find she received two letters, which, though they contain no matter of importance, I insert merely because they show the variety of character in the persons who prided themselves in her good opinion. Few portfolios, perhaps, ever contained the letters of two individuals more unlike than Mr. Jekyll and Mrs. Hannah More.

“*Spring Gardens, Nov. 13, 1811.*

“DEAR MRS. SIDDONS,

“If I had been bred on the Rialto, and your precious note were negotiable, in spite of Lord Stanhope's bill, I would engage to get it discounted for three thousand ducats by any Christian man of taste and talent. Why have you not patriotism enough to teach the Bank Directors how to issue paper which may defy depreciation ? But, on Thursday next, I must be fortunate.

“You are my neighbour too. Better and better. I need not

‘Build me  
A willow cabin at your gate.’

We will have talk and good talk, and as much nonsense too as we had at the Countess-dowager's of Cork and Orrery. And you shall not talk in your sleep, as you used to do at Dunsinane. And I won't talk as if to put people to sleep, which I do in Westminster Hall ; but we will both talk broad awake, and rail at cardinals, and at Lord Angelo, and at Lord Ellenborough ; for, thanks to some one or other of them, I suppose we shall hardly ever meet, either night or morning.

“ Believe me, dear Mrs. Siddons, with a thousand thanks for your continual remembrance of me,

“ Most truly and gratefully yours,

JOSEPH Jekyll.”

The other epistle was occasioned by its writer having sent Mrs. Siddons a copy of one of her works, most probably, her “ Sacred Dramas.”

“ *Barley Wood, Dec. 14, 1811.*”

“ MY DEAR MADAM,

“ I cannot refuse myself the gratification of returning you my sincere thanks for your very interesting and obliging letter—the piety of which delighted me still more than the kindness. Though the current of life has carried us different ways, and I have had the happiness of so little personal intercourse with you, yet I have been long assured that ‘ your ear was patient of a serious song.’ The serious spirit which pervades your letter is a strong confirmation of the opinion I have been long led to entertain of your devout disposition. Oh! my dear madam, there is no other lasting good,—no other solid peace, no other final consolation. This has doubtless been your refuge and your preservation from the perils of the deserved praise and admiration which your extraordinary talents have so eminently obtained. I have heard that you consider the Bible as your treasure. May it continue to be your guide through life, and your support in that inevitable hour which awaits us all.

“ It has pleased God to bless my little book with a degree of success which I had no reason to expect; but I can truly say, that among the favourable testimonies which kindness and partiality have bestowed on it, there is not one that has so highly gratified me as that of Mrs. Siddons. Believe me, my dear madam, with real regard,

“ Your affectionate friend,

“ HANNAH MORE.”

Mrs. Siddons, in several of her letters, speaks with some impatience of her fatiguing theatrical duties, and of the gladness which it would give her to find repose from them. I fully believe in the sincerity of her declarations to this effect, though they are strongly contrasted with other feelings, which obviously arose in her mind, at the nearest prospect of bidding a last farewell to her profession. It is a part of our nature to

cherish successive wishes, which, though natural in their time and turn, seem contradictory on revised comparison. In our longings for ease, we forget the *ennui* that attends inaction; but the mind takes a different view of the matter, at the real arrival of the moment when "Othello's occupation" must be gone. This was strongly the case with Mrs. Siddons, and I find her alluding, in her letters, to the prospect of quitting the stage more gravely than she had ever descanted upon its fatigues.

To Mrs. Piozzi she writes: "In this last season of my acting I feel as if I were mounting the first step of a ladder conducting me to the other world." It is natural for great players, whose posthumous and present fame are so sadly unequal, to part from their profession with more regret than other inspired artists, whose compositions may bespeak a place for them in human memories when they shall be no more.

Mrs. Siddons, however, was sensible that a great theatrical career ought to terminate while the actor's powers are undiminished, like the sun setting in the tropical sky, without a twilight. She obviously made a mighty effort to render the season of her departure splendidly memorable. She performed fifty-seven times,\* and in fourteen different characters, among which, independently of those which suited her years, she blended many parts of younger heroines, and gave them a charm that was absolutely marvellous in the person of an actress of fifty-six.

She took her professional farewell of the stage on the 29th of June, 1812.† The play was "Macbeth." At an early hour a vast crowd assembled around the theatre of Covent Garden, and, when the doors were opened, the struggle for places be-

\* She performed in 1811-12, *Lady Macbeth* ten times; *Mrs. Beverley*, four; *Lady Constance*, four; *Elvira*, five; *Euphrasia*, twice; *Queen Katharine*, six; *Isabella*, ("Fatal Marriage"), twice; *Isabella* ("Measure for Measure"), seven; *Belvidera*, six; *Hermione*, four; *Volumnia*, four; *Mrs. Haller*, twice.

† Mrs. Siddons was solicited in the strongest manner to return to the stage professionally, but she had the sense to refuse. Return she did for a few nights, but it could not be called professionally. May 25, 1813, she acted gratis for the Theatrical Fund. Drury Lane, June 22, she acted for the same charity. June 11, 1813, at Covent Garden, for Charles Kemble's benefit. At Edinburgh, Nov. 1815, ten times, for the family of her deceased son. May 31, 1816, at Covent Garden for the benefit of Mr. and Mrs. C. Kemble. June 8, and 22, 1816, by the express desire of the Princess Charlotte. June 29, for the Theatrical Fund. June 5, 1817, for Charles Kemble's benefit. June 9, 1819, for the benefit of Mr. and Mrs. C. Kemble.

came a service of danger. After the sleep-walking scene, in the tragedy, the applause of the spectators became ungovernable: they stood on the benches, and demanded that the performance of the piece should not go farther than the last scene in which she appeared. As this wish seemed to be felt by the great majority, the actor Chapman came forward, and signified that it should be complied with. The curtain was dropped for twenty minutes: after which it rose, and discovered Mrs. Siddons sitting at a table, dressed simply in white. She came forward amid the most fervent acclamations, which for several minutes prevented her from speaking. When silence was obtained, she delivered, with modest dignity, but with much emotion, the following Address, written for the occasion, by her nephew, Horace Twiss.

### FAREWELL ADDRESS,

SPOKEN BY MRS. SIDDONS, ON LEAVING THE STAGE,

29th of June, 1812.

Who has not felt, how growing use endears  
 The fond remembrance of our former years?  
 Who has not sigh'd, when doom'd to leave at last  
 The hopes of youth, the habits of the past,  
 The thousand ties and interests that impart  
 A second nature to the human heart,  
 And, wreathing round it close, like tendrils climb,  
 Blooming in age, and sanctified by time?

Yes! at this moment crowd upon my mind  
 Scenes of bright days for ever left behind,  
 Bewildering visions of enraptur'd youth,  
 When hope and fancy wore the hues of truth,  
 And long-forgotten years, that almost seem  
 The faded traces of a morning dream!  
 Sweet are those mournful thoughts: for they renew  
 The pleasing sense of all I owe to you,  
 For each inspiring smile, and soothing tear—  
 For those full honours of my long career,  
 That cheer'd my earliest hope, and chas'd my latest fear!

And tho', for me, those tears shall flow no more,  
 And the warm sunshine of your smile is o'er,—  
 Tho' the bright beams are fading fast away  
 That shone unclouded through my summer day,—  
 Yet, grateful Memory shall reflect their light  
 O'er the dim shadows of the coming night,

And lend to later life a softer tone,  
A moonlight tint,—a luster of her own.

Judges and Friends! to whom the magic strain  
Of Nature's feeling never spoke in vain,  
Perhaps your hearts, when years have glided by,  
And past emotions wake a fleeting sigh,  
May think on her, whose lips have pour'd so long  
The charmed sorrows of your Shakspeare's song :—  
On her, who parting to return no more,  
*Is* now the mourner she but *seem'd* before,—  
Herself subdued; resigns the melting spell,  
And breathes, with swelling heart, her long, her last Farewell !

Her utterance was interrupted by strong agitation towards the conclusion of the address, and, when it was ended, Mr. Kemble led her off the stage, amid the deepest manifestations of public feeling.

During this season, Mrs. Siddons removed from Westbourne, and lived for some months in lodgings in Pall Mall. I remember, when I called to pay my respects to her, I was struck at seeing a long line of carriages that filled the street, and I concluded that there was a levee at St. James's. I soon found, however, that the carriages belonged to the visitants of the Tragic Queen.

## CHAPTER XX.

Mrs. Siddons reads to the Royal Family at Windsor—Has her Likeness taken by the painter Harlowe—Her Readings at the Argyle Rooms—Visits, by invitation, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge—Her Tour to Paris—She visits the Louvre—Death of her son Henry—Acts at Edinburgh for the benefit of his surviving family—Reappears on the Stage, by command of the Princess Charlotte—Her last Performance, for the benefit of Mr. Charles Kemble—Joins her brother John, at Lausanne—Mrs. Garrick's Bequest to her—Mrs. Siddons's gratification at Fanny Kemble's performance—Her last Illness, Death, and Funeral—General Eulogium on her Character.

Mrs. SIDDONS had not been many months retired from the stage, when she received an invitation from the Royal Family to visit Windsor, an incident respecting which she sends the following account to her friend Mrs. Fitz Hugh.

*"Westbourne, January 26, 1813.*

" I have been these three days meditating about writing you an account of my Windsor visit, which you have, no doubt, seen mentioned in the newspapers; but, whether occasioned by the fatigue of that visit, or from an habitual tendency, my head has been more heavy and painful since my return home than it has been for many months; but, though very far from well at present, I cannot resist the pleasure of telling you myself what I know you will be gratified to hear.—Take it thus verbatim:

" On the 18th (I think it was) I was in the middle of dressing to go and dine with Mrs. Damer, when an especial messenger arrived in the dusk, with a letter from my old friend the Dowager Lady Stewart, to tell me that the queen had ordered her to write and say, 'that her majesty wished very much to hear me read, and desired to have an answer returned immediately to Carlton House, where the party from Windsor dined that day,' which was Wednesday. I, of course, wrote that I should be happy to have the honour of obeying the queen's commands, and therefore left my own house on Friday, according to appointment, and went to Frogmore, where I was informed that every thing would be prepared for my arrival. I got there about three, and was conducted into a very elegant drawing-room, where I sat till it was time to go to the Castle, and consult with Lady Stewart respecting the reading. I spent about an hour very agreeably in her apartment with herself and Princess Elizabeth, who appears the best-natured person in the world. We concluded for some part of 'Henry VIII,' some part of the 'Merchant of Venice,' and to finish with some scenes from 'Hamlet.' After this I dined with Madame Bechendorf, her majesty's confidential gentlewoman. When Lady Harcourt returned, after dining with the queen, I again went to her apartment, where Princess Elizabeth renewed her visit, and staid and chatted very charmingly, of course, because her conversation was chiefly about the pleasure they had all formerly received from my exertions, and the delight of hearing me again. We then parted for the night, the ladies to the queen's card-party, and I to Frogmore, where the steward and house-keeper came to me, to say that her majesty and the princess had been there in the morning, and had left a message to desire that I would consider myself as in my own house, with repeated injunctions to make my residence there as agreeable as possible. The next day the whole royal party from Windsor, with Princess Charlotte and the Dukes of Cambridge and

Clarence, dined at Frogmore. Many of the gentry and nobility were invited to the reading; and at about half-past eight I entered the room where they were all assembled. The queen, the princesses, and the Duchess of York, all came to me, and conversed most graciously, till the queen took her place. Then the company seated themselves, and I began. It all went off to my heart's content, for the room was the finest place for the voice in the world. I retired, sometimes, at her majesty's request, to rest; and, when it was over, I had the extreme satisfaction to find that they had been all extremely delighted. Lady Stewart wrote me yesterday, that I am still the inexhaustible fund of conversation and eulogium. When the queen retired, after the reading, Lady Stewart brought to me a magnificent gold chain, with a cross of many-coloured jewels, from her majesty, and hung it about my neck before all the company. This was a great surprise, and you may imagine how so great an honour affected me. You may conceive, too, the pleasure it gave me to be able to divert a few of those mournfully monotonous hours which these amiable sufferers, from the singularly afflicting nature of their misfortune, are doomed to undergo. I found that the queen had been desirous that I should not return the next day, but stay and read again to her at the Castle next night, which I was happy to do. This reading consisted of passages from 'Paradise Lost,' 'Gray's Elegy,' and 'Marmion.' When I went into the room, I found her majesty, with all the princesses, and the Princess Charlotte, seated, and a table and chair prepared for me, which she (most graciously saying she was sure I must still feel fatigued from the last night's exertion) ordered me to seat myself in, when I thanked her for the magnificent favour\* I had received, and hoped the reading of the preceding night had not fatigued her majesty, for she really had a terrible cough and cold. She hoped that the keepsake would remind me of Frogmore, and said 'that it was impossible to be fatigued when she was so extremely delighted.' I then took my leave, intending to return home the next day, which was Monday, but having long meditated a short visit to Lord and Lady Harcourt, who live at St. Leonard's Hill, about four miles from Frogmore, I called there, and Lady Harcourt persuaded me to remain with her, and was so good as to make me send for Cecilia and Miss Wilkinson. While I was there

\* In the same year she did me the honour of presenting me with a gift, which I would not exchange for even a gold chain from royalty. It was a silken quilt for my bed, which she sewed with her own hands.

I received another command from her majesty ; and the next Sunday evening I read 'Othello' to the royal party at the Castle : and here my story ends. I have much to say if I had eyes and head ; my heart, however, is still strong, and am, with undiminished affection,

" Yours,

" S. S."

Very soon afterward she paid a visit to her friends the Blackshaws, at their seat in Windsor Forest, where she met with Harlowe the painter, who took an admirable likeness of her, in the sleeping-scene of *Lady Macbeth*.

Though she had now professionally bidden adieu to the stage, she was bound by no consideration to take an absolute leave of her popularity ; and, during the next season, she gave public readings of poetry at the Argyle Rooms, in London.

The style in which these readings were got up was simple and tasteful :—In front of what was the orchestra in the old Argyle Rooms, a reading-desk with lights was placed, on which lay her book, a quarto volume, printed with large letter. When her memory could not be entirely trusted, she assisted her sight by spectacles, which, in the intervals, she handled and waved so gracefully that you could not have wished her to be without them. A large red screen formed what painters would call a background to the person of the charming reader. She was dressed in white, and her dark hair, *à la Grecque*, crossed her temples in full masses. There was something remarkably elegant in the self-possession of her entrance, and in the manner in which she addressed the assembly. Her readings were alternately from Milton and Shakspeare. I have already made free to confess my conviction that the works of the former poet are too spiritual and undramatic to be susceptible of any improvement from human elocution. But, about her readings of Shakspeare, I can only say that, to my understanding, no acting I ever witnessed, nor dramatic criticism I ever read, illustrated the poet so closely and so perfectly. In the following letter respecting Mrs. Siddons, which I had the honour of receiving from Miss Edgeworth, I am happy to find this pre-eminent writer expressing the same idea.

" DEAR SIR,

" I heard Mrs. Siddons read, at her town-house, a portion of 'Henry VIII.' I was more struck and delighted than I ever was with any reading in my life. This is feebly expressing

what I felt : I felt that I had never before fully understood or sufficiently admired Shakspeare, or known the full powers of the human voice and the English language. *Queen Katharine* was a character peculiarly suited to her time of life and to reading. There was nothing that required gesture or vehemence incompatible with the sitting attitude. The composure and dignity, and the sort of suppressed feeling, and touches, not bursts of tenderness, of matronly, not youthful tenderness, were all favourable to the general effect. I quite forgot to applaud—I thought she was what she appeared. The illusion was perfect till it was interrupted by a hint from her daughter or niece, I forget which, that Mrs. Siddons would be encouraged by having some demonstration given of our feelings. I then expressed my admiration ; but the charm was broken,—

‘To Barry we gave loud applause,  
To Garrick only tears.’

“Yours, &c.  
“M. E.”

Soon after these readings, she received an intimation from the most eminent characters of Oxford and Cambridge, that their respective Universities would feel themselves honoured by her visiting them. This invitation, like that from royalty, necessarily involved the understanding that its honour was to be its own reward. She nevertheless accepted it, and went to both places, where she was received with enthusiastic hospitality. Her readings were given at what were called private parties ; but which included very numerous audiences, and all the distinguished individuals of the colleges. She might be said to have received the highest honours at both Universities. Miss Siddons thus writes to Miss Wilkinson, respecting her mother’s reception at Cambridge.

“*Melton Mowbray, July 22, 1814.*

“**MY DEAR PATTY,**

“On the delightful days which we have spent at Cambridge I shall always look back with pride and pleasure. I over and over wished for you, who would have enjoyed as much as I did the attention and admiration shown to our *Darling*. Oxford in term-time did not equal Cambridge in vacation, and was almost empty. Mr. and Mrs. Frere were most hospitable,

and his kindness and her singing would have alone made the place agreeable to us. But then we had sights to see—colleges and libraries to examine, and at every one of them there was a principal inhabitant eager to show, and proud to entertain Mrs. Siddons. In the public library, my mother received the honour of an address from Professor Clarke, who presented her with a handsome Bible from the Stereotype Press. After which she read, to almost all the members of the University at present there, the trial-scene in the *Merchant of Venice*, and more finely she never did it in her life. Every one was, or seemed to be, enchanted and enthusiastic.

“Yours truly,

“C. SIDDONS.”

Early in the autumn of the same year she made an excursion to Paris, in company with her daughter and Miss Wilkinson. I was also one of the many English who availed themselves of the first short peace to get a sight of the continent. The Louvre was at that time in possession of its fullest wealth. In the statuary hall of that place I had the honour of giving Mrs. Siddons my arm the first time she walked through it, and the first time in both our lives that we saw the Apollo of Belvidere. From the farthest end of that spacious room, the god seemed to look down like a president on the chosen assembly of sculptured forms, and his glowing marble, unstained by time, appeared to my imagination as if he had stepped freshly from the sun. I had seen casts of the glorious statue with scarcely any admiration; and I must undoubtedly impute that circumstance in part to my inexperience in art, and to my taste having till then lain torpid. But still I prize the recollected impressions of that day too dearly to call them fanciful. They seemed to give my mind a new sense of the harmony of art—a new visual power of enjoying beauty. Nor is it mere fancy that makes the difference between the Apollo himself and his plaster casts. The dead whiteness of the stucco copies is glaringly monotonous, while the diaphanous surface of the original seems to soften the light which it reflects. Every particular feeling of that hour is written indelibly on my memory. I remember entering the Louvre with a latent suspicion on my mind that a good deal of the rapture expressed at the sight of superlative sculptures was exaggerated or affected; but, as we passed through the passage of the hall, there was a Greek figure, I think that of Pericles, with a clamys and helmet, which John Kemble desired me to notice;

and it instantly struck me with wonder at the gentlemanlike grace which art could give to a human form with so simple a vesture. It was not, however, until we reached the grand saloon, that the first sight of the god overawed my incredulity. Every step of approach to his presence added to my sensations, and all recollections of his name in classic poetry swarmed on my mind as spontaneously as the associations that are conjured up by the sweetest music.

The reader, by this time, will probably ask a truce to the account of my own impressions, and require to have those of Mrs. Siddons. Engrossed as I was with the Apollo, I could not forget the honour of being before him in the company of so august a worshipper; and it certainly increased my enjoyment to see the first interview between the paragon of Art and that of Nature. She was evidently much struck, and remained a long time before the statue; but, like a true admirer, was not loquacious. I remember, however, that she said, "What a great idea it gives us of God, to think that he has made a human being capable of fashioning so divine a form!" When we walked round to other sculptures, I observed that almost every eye in the hall was fixed upon her, and followed her; yet I could perceive that she was not known, as I overheard the spectators say, "Who is she?—Is she not an English woman!" At this time she was in her fifty-ninth year, and yet her looks were so noble, that she made you proud of English beauty, even in the presence of Grecian sculpture.

The following year gave her a seyere shock in the death of her son Henry. He expired of a consumptive complaint, at the age of forty, while manager of the Edinburgh theatre. Henry Siddons was a sensible judge of dramatic poetry, and, as a player, he had merit in certain parts, as well as universal industry and application. But he was not a great actor. He was by far too sensitive for the vocation, and felt all its rubs and criticisms with too morbid acuteness. His very resemblance to his mother was a misfortune to him, by always challenging invidious comparison.\* Mrs. Siddons told me that he was the most unfortunate man in his choice of a profession, but the most judicious and happy in the choice of a wife. He married Miss Murray, the daughter of the actor. His mother's grief for him is strongly expressed in the following notes to Mrs. Fitz Hugh:

\* An account of his dramatic and literary works is given in the *Biographic Dramatica*.

"Westbourne, 1815.

"This third shock has indeed sadly shakea me, and although in the very depths of affliction, I agree with you that consolation may be found, yet the voice of nature will for a time overpower that of reason ; and I cannot but remember 'that such things were, and were most dear to me.'

"I am tolerably well, but have no voice. This is entirely nervousness, and fine weather will bring it back to me. Write to me, and let me receive consolation in a better account of your precious health. My brother and Mrs. Kemble have been very kind and attentive, as indeed they always were in all events of sickness or of sorrow. The little that was left of my poor sight is almost washed away by tears, so that I fear I write scarce legibly. God's will be done !

"S. S."

"Tuesday, April 7, 1815.

"I don't know why, unless that I am older and feebler, or that I am now without a profession, which forced me out of myself in my former afflictions, but the loss of my poor dear Harry seems to have laid a heavier hand upon my mind than any I have sustained. I drive out to recover my voice and my spirits, and am better while abroad ; but I come home and lose them both in an hour. I cannot read or do any thing else but puddle with my clay. I have begun a full-length figure of Cecilia ; and this is a resource which fortunately never fails me. Mr. Fitz Hugh approves of it, and that is good encouragement. I have little to complain of, except a low voice and lower spirits.

"Yours,

"S. S."

Before the year 1815 expired, Mrs. Siddons consented to give the family of her deceased son Henry the benefit of her acting for ten nights, in Edinburgh ; and she repaired thither, but by slow stages, paying many visits to her friends during the journey. At Kirby Moorside she stopped for several days with Sir Ralph and Lady Noel, and Lady Byron. The effort of acting at Edinburgh, on the stage which brought to her mind so many recollections of her son, was peculiarly painful. A nervous agitation perceptibly affected her on the first night of her appearance, and now and then interrupted her voice ; but, after the first scene, she subdued this sensation, and her faculties were displayed in their full power. The ablest theatrical criticism that appeared in Edinburgh respecting her said as

follows : " Mrs. Siddons not only is, but looks older than when she was last before us. But in this single observation every thing inauspicious to her efforts is included and exhausted."

The same compliment was paid to her acting in London in 1816, when, at the command of the Princess Charlotte, she reappeared on the stage for a few nights. Her royal highness was unfortunately prevented by illness from enjoying the gratification which she had bespoken ; but the general report of public opinion was, that Mrs. Siddons showed neither abatement of skill nor relaxation of spirit in her acting.\*

As Miss Siddons grew up, and required to mix in the world, Mrs. Siddons found her abode at Westbourne rather too retired. She therefore gave it up ; and in 1817 took the lease of a house, pleasantly situated, with an adjoining garden and small green, at the top of Upper Baker-street, on the right side

\* During the same year she did me the honour of dining with me, at my house, in Sydenham, and it was to me a memorable day, from the ludicrous, though happily temporary distress that attended it. Mrs. Siddons, much as she loved fame, detested being made a show of when she paid visits of mere personal friendship ; and, when she promised to dine with Mrs. Campbell and myself, it was on a distinct understanding that she was to meet only our own family. I was particularly anxious to keep my word on this point, and forbore to invite any of my friends, much as many of them would have been gratified by seeing her. About noon there arrived two strangers, American gentlemen. One of them was the brother of Washington Irving, and they both brought me letters of introduction from Sir Walter Scott. I was very happy to see them, but felt no small alarm, when, from a servant having come into the room and babbled something about Mrs. Siddons and dinner, my American guests discovered what I wished them not to know. " Ha ! Mrs. Siddons," they exclaimed ; " then we will stop and dine with you also."—" Well, gentlemen," I said, " to-morrow or next day, or any other day in the year, I shall be delighted to receive you hospitably ; but really Mrs. Siddons laid her commands upon me that she should meet no strangers, and I cannot invite you to stop."—" Oh, but we can stop," said they, " without invitation. You can get us out, to be sure, by calling in the constable, but, unless you force us away, we will have a sight of the Siddons." And they kept their word. When her carriage approached the house, I went out to conduct her over a short pathway on the common, as well as to prepare her for a sight of the strangers. It was the only time, during a friendly acquaintance of so many years, that I ever saw a cloud upon her brow. She received my apology very coldly, and walked into my house with tragic dignity. At first she kept the gentlemen of the New World at a transatlantic distance ; and they made the matter worse, as I thought, for a time, by the most extravagant flattery. But my Columbian friends had more address than I supposed, and they told her so many interesting anecdotes about their native stage, and the enthusiasm of their countrymen respecting herself, that she grew frank and agreeable, and shook hands with both of them at parting.

towards the Regent's Park. Here, as at Westbourne, she built an additional room for her modelling.

The last time that she appeared on any stage was in *Lady Randolph*, for the benefit of Charles Kemble, at Covent Garden, on the 9th of June, 1819. The part, I think, was injudiciously chosen: it is long and laborious, it brings the actress almost constantly before the audience, and is not, like *Lady Macbeth* or *Queen Katharine*, equally striking in every scene. Her action in the greater part of the play was thought to be somewhat redundant, and to want that grand repose for which she had been so celebrated. In many passages, however, she was still herself:—particularly in the threatening injunction to *Glenalvon* to beware of injuring *Young Norval*, when she uttered the words

“Thou look'st at me as if thou fain wouldest pry  
Into my heart—’tis open as my speech;”

and when she swept past him with an indignant wave of her arm.—She was also great in her final exit, when, exclaiming

“For such a son,  
And such a husband, drove me to my fate!”

she rushed distractedly from the stage.

The audience showed their devotion for her: at the question of *Young Norval*

“But did my sire surpass the rest of men,  
As thou excellest all of womankind?”

they applied the words to Mrs. Siddons, by three rounds of applause.

In the July of 1819, his Royal Highness the Prince Regent gave a grand fancy-ball, respecting which Mrs. Siddons sent the following good-humoured note to her friend Mrs. Fitz Hugh:

“July 12, 1819.

“Well, my dear friend, though I am not of rank and condition to be myself at the prince's ball, my fine clothes, at any rate, will have that honour. Lady B. has borrowed my *Lady Macbeth's* finest banquet dress, and I wish her ladyship joy in wearing it, for I found the weight of it almost too much for me.”

durance for half an hour. How will she be able to carry it for such a length of time? But young and old, it seems, are expected to appear, upon that 'high solemnity,' in splendid and fanciful apparel, and many of these beauties will appear in my stage finery.

"Lady C. at first intended to present herself (as she said very drollly) as a vestal virgin, but has now decided upon the dress of a fair Circassian. I should like to see this gorgeous assembly, and I have some thoughts of walking in in the last dress of *Lady Macbeth*, and swear I came there in my sleep. But enough of this nonsense.

"S. S."

The departure of her brother John for Switzerland, the air of which country agreed much better than that of London with his declining health, was a severe privation to her, and she consoled her sisterly affection by going to visit him at Lausanne, in 1821. She found him living in a beautiful retirement, near the borders of the Leman Lake.

Miss Siddons writes from thence, in her mother's name, to her friend Mrs. Fitz Hugh.

"Lausanne, July 13, 1821.

"Here we are, without accident, seated in this most comfortable house (such another, I suppose, there is not in the canton), in the midst of this divine scenery. I do not yet think it real—no more, I believe, does my mother; but she is well, and delighted to see her brother. Both he and Mrs. Kemble seem as perfectly happy as I ever saw two human beings. They received us most kindly. Their situation is a blessed one. The house has been built only five years, and by a person who has been in England, and therefore has some faint notions of comfort. It overlooks the lake, and has fine views in every direction. My mother is dying to see Chamouny, but every one assures her it would be next to impossible for her, and that the fatigue would prevent her enjoying it. So I believe we are all to make a little tour to Berne."

The expedition to Chamouny seems to have been given up, for Miss Siddons very soon afterward writes thus to Miss Wilkinson: "Our tour answered perfectly as far as it went. The weather at first was beautiful, but is changed, and set in so determinedly for rain, that we cut it short, and came back four

days sooner than we intended. It is quite useless to attempt describing the beauties of the scenery. My uncle says, that what we saw is far finer than the tour to Chamonix, which I think we shall not now see, nor much regret, having eaten of chamois, crossed a lake, mounted a glacier with two men cutting steps in the ice with a hatchet, and done most of the surprising things that travellers boast of. My mother bore all the fatigues much more wonderfully than any of us."

The widow of Garrick died in 1822, at a venerable age. She made the following bequest to the great actress, in a codicil to her will, dated August 15, 1822:

"I give to Mrs. Siddons a pair of gloves which were Shakespeare's, and were presented by one of his family to my late dear husband, during the jubilee at Stratford-upon-Avon."

Information of the above reached Mrs. Siddons, with this note from Mrs. Garrick's executors:

"5 Adelphi Terrace, Oct. 30, 1822.

"MADAM,

"We beg leave to transmit to you the above extract from a codicil to Mrs. Garrick's will, and to acquaint you that we will have the honour of waiting on you, for the purpose of delivering the relic therein mentioned, whenever you may be so good as to inform us that it may be convenient to you to receive our visit.

"We remain, with much respect,

"Madam,

"Your most obedient humble servants,

"THOS. RACKET, G. F. BELTZ,

"Executors.

"P.S. We beg leave to mention, that on Saturday next we shall be absent from town, and that we shall leave town for a few days on Wednesday next.

"Mrs. Siddons."

After this period, there was a sameness in Mrs. Siddons's life that furnishes little interesting matter for biography. She generally spent her winters, with the exception of the Christmas weeks, at her house in Baker-street, and gave frequent and large parties, at which, till a year or two before her death, she treated her friends to readings from Shakspeare. During

the summer she repaired to some watering-place, or divided the months in visiting her particular friends.\*

In her advanced age she could not expect to be free from the infirmities that flesh is heir to; and that complaint, the erysipelas, which ultimately carried her off, frequently attacked her with a burning soreness in her mouth, or with headaches that were equally painful. Yet, till the last year of a long life, she had a hale and cheerful aspect. Time itself seemed to lay his touches upon her reverentially, for she always looked many years younger than her age: her step, her voice, and her eyes, denoted a mind of unchanged tranquillity and intelligence. I find, from her letters, that the deaths of some of her friends affected her strongly, especially those of Mrs. Damer and Mrs. Piozzi; but it is hardly fair to commemorate as misfortunes those griefs from which none are exempted but the selfish and the callous.

The incident that most agreeably excited her in her last years, was the favourable reception of Fanny Kemble on the stage. She went to see her niece's performance, and was moved to tears of joy.

In her seventy-third year she wrote the following letter to Mrs. Fitz Hugh:—

\* The friends whom she chiefly visited in the country were the Fitz Hughs, at Barnisters; Mrs. Arkwright, at Stoke, in Derbyshire; Mrs. John Kemble, at Cheltenham; Lady Noel, and Lady Byron; the Marrows, at St. John's College, Oxford; the Freres, at Cambridge; the Blackshaws, at their seat in Berkshire; Mr. and Mrs. Halsey, at Henley Park; the Elliots, at Hurst; Lady Barrington, at Bedfied; Lord and Lady Darnley, at Cobham; and Lord and Lady Arran, at Bognor. With the last of these families she became acquainted in consequence of coming one summer to live in their neighbourhood. Her cottage happened to be that which the deceased poet, Hayley, had possessed. The Arrans begged permission to wait upon her the moment they heard of her arrival, and her intimacy with them became so cordial, that she spent seven successive Christmases at their house.

In the intercourse of so popular a person it is hardly possible to draw an exact line of distinction between mere acquaintance and friendship; and in the following enumeration I cannot pretend to name all who were the intimate friends of her later years. But the persons whom I saw oftenest at her house during the last fifteen years of her life, besides those whom I have just mentioned, were Mrs. Piozzi; Sir George and Lady Beaumont; Lady Charlotte Campbell; Lord Sidmouth; Mr. H. Addington; Lady Harcourt; Lord and Lady Scarborough; Countess Clare; Dr. Batty; Professor Smyth; the Rev. Sydney Smith; Dr. Holland; the Rev. Dr. Whalley; the Rev. Mr. Milman; the Rev. Mr. Harness; Mr. and Miss Rogers; Mr. Sharp; Mrs. Baillie, and Joanna Baillie.

*" Cobham Hall, the Seat of Lord Darnley, 1827.*

" I have brought myself to see whether change of scene, and the cordial kindness of my noble host and hostess, will not at least do something to divert my torment. But real evils will not give way to such applications, gratifying though they may be. I have had the honour, however, of conversing with Prince Leopold ; he is a very agreeable and sensible converser, and her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent seems to justify all the opinions of her amiability. I have begun to recover the loss of my dear little girls, George's daughters. How I long to hear that they are safe in the arms of their anxious parents.

" In this magnificent place, I assure you, my seventy-second birthday was celebrated with the most gratifying and flattering cordiality. We had music and Shakspeare, which Lord Darnley has at his fingers' ends. I should have enjoyed the party more if it had not been so large ; but twenty-three people at dinner is rather too much of a good thing. \* \* \* \* Talking of the arts, I cannot help thinking with sorrow of the statue of my poor brother. It is an absolute libel on his noble person and air. I should like to pound it into dust, and scatter it to the winds.

" Yours,

" S. S."

The illness that proved fatal attacked her in April, 1831, when she had entered on her seventy-sixth year. The appearance of the erysipelas on one of her ankles considerably alarmed her medical attendant, Mr. Bushell ; but he treated her so judiciously that the symptoms grew more favourable ; and before the end of the month she felt so much recovered, that she jocularly told him she had no need of his visits, for "*she had health to sell.*"

Unfortunately, however, she ventured out soon afterward, in a carriage, one very bleak day, and the cold appears to have driven in her malady to the vital regions. On the 31st of May she was seized with vomitings and rigors, and in the course of the evening both her legs were attacked with erysipelatous inflammation. This increased during the night, and was accompanied with much fever. In the course of the following day she was seen by Dr. Leman. Her state became hourly more alarming. Gangrenous spots soon made their appearance ; and about nine on the morning of the 8th of June she expired, after a week of acute suffering.

Y

Her funeral took place on the 15th of June. Soon after ten in the morning the procession began to move from Upper Baker-street to the place of interment, the new ground of Paddington Church, in this order :

Feathers.  
Hearse and four Horses.  
Two Mourning Coaches with four Horses.  
In the first Mr. Charles Kemble, } her Executors.  
Mr. Horace Twiss, }  
Two Sons of Mrs. Henry Siddons. "  
In the second Mr. Meyrick, Executor.  
Mr. Stirling,  
Mr. Bushell, } her Medical Attendants.  
Dr. Leman, }  
Mrs. Siddons's private Carriage.  
Mr. C. Kemble's ditto.

Then followed eleven mourning coaches, with the performers of the Theatres Royal Drury Lane and Covent Garden. They arrived at the church about half-past eleven, when the service was read in the most impressive manner by the Rev. Mr. Campbell. There were supposed to be at least 5000 persons present, many of whom were seen to shed tears. A young woman, who came veiled, and whose name was never discovered, knelt beside the coffin with demonstrations of the strongest grief. The grave bears this simple inscription:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF  
SARAH SIDDONS,  
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE JUNE 8, 1831,  
IN HER 76TH YEAR.

**"BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD."**

The English, on all subjects excepting politics, have a reservedness of speech, and a dislike to the display of enthusiasm, that often makes them appear more indifferent to interesting events than they really are. Among the French, the obsequies of so illustrious a person would have drawn forth bursts of expression from the whole national heart, and they would have commanded her relics to be interred in the Pantheon. The British public gave no such vivid tokens of their regard for Mrs. Siddons; but her death was everywhere men-

\* In the inside of Paddington Church, there is a marble slab to her memory, near the altar, with the subjoined text : " *I know that my Redeemer liveth.*"

tioned with strong and just recollections of her unrivalled glory as an actress, and her unquestioned private worth ; and I am far from imagining that the sensation of regret was not general, though unostentatiously expressed. Many years as she had been retired from the stage, it could not be forgotten how long she had been its peerless pride ; and that the dignified decorum of her life had added to the respectability of her profession. It was her own wish that she should be interred with the plainest simplicity ; and I know not how it is, but so it is, that I visit her suburban grave with calmer sensations of melancholy pleasure than if I had to approach it in Westminster Abbey,

“ Through rows of warriors, and through ranks of kings.”\*

In speaking of her as an actress, my predominant sensation, while writing her Life, has been a consciousness of my incompetence to do her justice. Her lofty beauty, her graceful walk and gesture, and her potent elocution, were endowments which at the first sight marked her supremacy on the stage. But it was not the classical propriety of a speech, nor the grandeur or pathos of a scene,—it was no individual or insulated beauty, that we exclusively admired. These received their full portion of applause, and to many individuals might seem to exhaust the theme of her praise. But it was the high judgment which watched over all these qualifications, the equally vigilant sympathy which threw itself into the assumed character,—it was her sustained understanding of her part, her self-devotion to it, and her abstraction from every thing else, and no casual bursts of effect, that riveted the experienced spectator’s admiration.

The greatest pleader of his age, Erskine, said that her performance was a school for orators,—that he had studied her cadences and intonation, and that to the harmony of her periods and pronunciation he was indebted for “ *his best displays.*”†

In hearing the magical musician Neukomme perform on the organ, he seemed to me to enlarge its diapason. Mrs. Siddons, on the stage, had a similar power to magnify one’s conception of the heart’s capacity for tender, intense, and lofty feelings. It was not enough to say of her acting, that it was a true and perfect picture of a human being in pathetic or ter-

\* Tickell’s Monody on the death of Addison.

† This declaration of Erskine was told me by Mr. Jekyll.

rific situations, for she seemed more than a human being ; her commanding intelligence seemed to bring her audience before *her*, and *not her* before her audience. The roll and radiance of her eye, the depth of her pathos, and the majesty of her scorn, made you feel as if you were witnessing some god-like soul from the heroic world pouring forth its sensibility.

My friend, Mr. Young, the actor, says to me in a letter respecting her : " I look back to those periods during which I had the good fortune to act with her as the happiest of my professional recollections. She was the most lofty-minded actress I ever beheld. Whatever she touched she ennobled. She never sought by unworthy means to entrap her audience. She disdained to apply to any of the petty resources of trickish minds, in order to startle and surprise her hearers. There was no habitual abruptness, no harshness about her. You never caught her slumbering through some scenes, in order to produce, by contrast, an exaggerated effect in others. She neglected nothing. From the first moment to the last, she was, according to theatric parlance, '*in the character.*' The spectator was always carried along with her ;—'*wept when she wept, smiled when she smiled, and each emotion of her heart became in turn his own.*' There were no pauses protracted till they became unintelligible. What was passing in her mind was read in her changing countenance. Each character became, in her changing mind, a perfect picture, in which, through all the changes of passion, a harmony was perceived."

Mrs. Siddons had a moderate talent for versification. I am not aware that the following lines, which were the production of her pen, were ever published.

#### LINES.

SAY, what's the brightest wreath of fame,  
But canker'd buds, that opening close ;  
Ah ! what the world's most pleasing dream,  
But broken fragments of repose ?

Lead me where Peace with steady hand  
The mingled cup of life shall hold,  
Where Time shall smoothly pour his sand,  
And Wisdom turn that sand to gold.

Then haply at Religion's shrine  
This weary heart its load shall lay,  
Each wish my fatal love resign,  
And passion melt in tears away.

In her personal character, she united high dignity of principle and self-respect with a quiet, pacific, and kindly temper. Those who knew her intimately may be so accustomed to think the benignity of her disposition a part of her character to be taken for granted, that they will possibly wonder at my anxiety in insisting on it. But, small is the number of such persons compared with the multitude of those who knew her but slightly; and there were some peculiarities in her mind and demeanour that tended to mislead superficial observers. Her gravity of manner, which was partly a family peculiarity, and partly the result of a thoughtful temper and strong religious impressions, made her appear the reverse of that social and pleasant being which she really was; for her hospitality as a hostess, and her agreeableness in a small circle of old acquaintances, could not be surpassed. But in mixed society she was only tacitly and passively the ornament of a party. Conscious of great fame, she had no hectic ambition for little popularity, and no powers for brilliancy in mixed conversation. Her understanding was very solid, and its deliberate conclusions were so sure, that in some of the most anxious moments of my life I have been thankful for her salutary counsel; yet, both her judgment and fancy were slow and indolent, so that they were little adapted for small talk and common-place subjects. She was proud, in the best sense of the word; but I believe it was not pride that created her reserve so much as diffidence in her own colloquial readiness.

In addition to the gravity that was natural to her, she had a coldness of manner on slight acquaintance, habitually acquired by the consciousness of her vocation. She felt that her profession would have exposed her both to the insolence and familiarity of patronage, if she had not possessed a great degree of defensive dignity. I do not say that she attained the very point of perfection, in assuming no more loftiness at any time than was absolutely required; but I am as sure as half a life of observation can make me, that she meant her dignity to be purely defensive, and never arrogant. She had too elevated a mind to give intentionally to any human creature a particle of superfluous pain.\*

\* From a letter with which I was favoured by Mr. Welsh, the musical composer, who had the honour of Mrs. Siddons's particular friendship, I make the following quotation in allusion to her benevolence:

"It has been said that Mrs. Siddons was not generous; to the contrary I can bear witness, and have pleasure in stating, that at the time George III. was too unwell to sign death-warrants, a friend of mine,

As evidences of the mistakes that were made with regard to the subordinate traits of her personal character (for its sum total stood above reproach), I venture to quote some few circumstances of my own observation, which, as they are minute may be carped at by illiberal criticism as too insignificant for a place in her Biography. But I beg more candid judgments to recollect how frequently our truest estimates of human nature are drawn from trifling incidents ; and really, if the novelist, in portraying some woman that never existed but in his own imagination, can interest us by minute details, it is hard if one may not hazard them in the life of an actual and illustrious being.

I had once by chance the honour of seeing Mrs. Siddons and the Duke of Wellington in the same party at Paris. They were observed, after a first mutual recognition, to stand by each other without conversing. I overheard a group of English people angrily remark, "What a proud woman is that Mrs. Siddons : she will not condescend to speak even to Wellington !" Now I had seen the duke, two evenings before, meet the great actress, and he addressed her with peculiar courtesy and graciousness. On this latter occasion I put no bad construction on his taciturnity. His grace was most likely as deficient in small talk as the great actress. But still less did I blame Mrs. Siddons's silence ; on the contrary, I regarded it as a trait of her true character. Her reserve in mixed company was independent and equal ; and she behaved to the Duke of Wellington exactly as she would have done to any other per-

interested himself greatly in behalf of three poor men, Ramsgate pilots, who lingered under sentence of death fourteen months in Newgate, expecting that the following Monday would terminate their existence. They had large families, to whom we had the happiness ultimately to send the sufferers back, cleared of every suspicion of guilt. During their confinement, Mrs. Siddons, in order to relieve the wants of their families, commissioned me to convey to them very considerable sums of money, but not to publish to the world the extent of her donations. If her mind was not susceptible, and her heart cold, then her acting in private life far surpassed even her efforts on the stage ; for, on hearing that they were saved and sent home to their families, the mixture of her smiles and tears exhibited what I conceived the most amiable feelings that could animate a human heart. The respect which all classes of society showed to Mrs. Siddons caused them to observe a distance, which was her greatest annoyance ; it prevented her enjoying society in general, and kept down her natural flow of spirits. But, to the few who knew her as I did, she was gay, and perfectly without ostentation,—kind and full of anecdote ; and such a creature as, I fear, we shall never see again."

son slightly acquainted with her, for she had no extra courtesy for rank.

She had very little light conversation in mixed company for anybody, but, when her heart was interested, she was very condescending, and would exert herself to please. She doted upon children. Some time after I had seen her in Paris, I visited her, with my son in my hand, who was then about six years old. I had to leave him with her for about an hour, and in my absence I had some misgivings that it was unfair to have taxed her with the company of so young a visitant. But, when I came back, I found the little fellow's face lighted up in earnest conversation with her. She had been amusing him with stories adapted to his capacity, and bestowed attentions on a child which she had refused to a conqueror.

It would be absurd in me to affect for the loss of this noble woman any thing like the grief of those friends who were her chief mourners, and who felt their consanguinity to her by the bleeding of their hearts. But I feel that my heart regrets and honours her with all its sincerity. Nor is it inconsistent with my serious reverence for her memory, that her image throws a sunshine on my imagination which excites it to cheerfulness. The most flattering delight that a friend could have in Mrs. Siddons's company was to see her smiles and hear her laugh. Hence my memory naturally reverts to her cheerful moments; and, as I cannot bear to think of her gloomily, I have not written her life lachrymosely. She herself could not blame me for intermixing my recollections of her memory with cheerful anecdotes. Is it not better to honour our dead friends by flowers upon their tombs than by the gloomiest sepulture?

Mrs. Siddons was a great, simple being, who was not shrewd in her knowledge of the world, and was not herself well understood in some particulars by the majority of the world. The universal feeling towards her was respectful, but she was thought austere. Now, with all her apparent haughtiness, there was no person more humble when humility morally became her. I have known her call up a servant whom she found she had undeservedly blamed, and beg his pardon before her family. Hundreds of her letters have been transmitted to me; and, though her correspondence has disappointed me, in being less available than I could have wished for quotation, yet, in one respect, it delighted me by the proofs which it gave of her endearing domestic character. In not one word of her notes, though some of them are written on subjects of petty vexation, is there a single trace of angry feeling.

From intense devotion to her profession, she derived a peculiarity of manner, of which I have the fullest belief she was not in the least conscious, unless reminded of it ;—I mean the habit of attaching dramatic tones and emphasis to commonplace colloquial subjects. She went, for instance, one day, into a shop at Bath, and after bargaining for some calico, and hearing the mercer pour forth a hundred commendations of the cloth, she put the question to him, “ *But will it wash?* ” in a manner so electrifying as to make the poor shopman start back from his counter. I once told her this anecdote about herself, and she laughed at it heartily, saying, “ Witness truth, I never meant to be tragical.” This singularity made her manner susceptible of caricature. I know not what others felt, but I own that I loved her all the better for this unconscious solemnity of manner ; for independently of its being blended with habitual kindness to her friends, and giving, odd as it may seem, a zest to the humour of her familiar conversation, it always struck me as a token of her simplicity. In point of fact, a manner in itself artificial sprung out of the *naïveté* of her character.

In the course of a long life, how few individuals have diffused so much delight and moral sympathy ! When a foreigner came to London, during her reign on the stage, and demanded to see all that England could boast of, could you have done justice to your country without showing him the Siddons as one of the ornaments of our empire ? And she was more than a woman of genius ; for the additional benevolence of her heart made her an honour to her sex and to human nature.

THE END.

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